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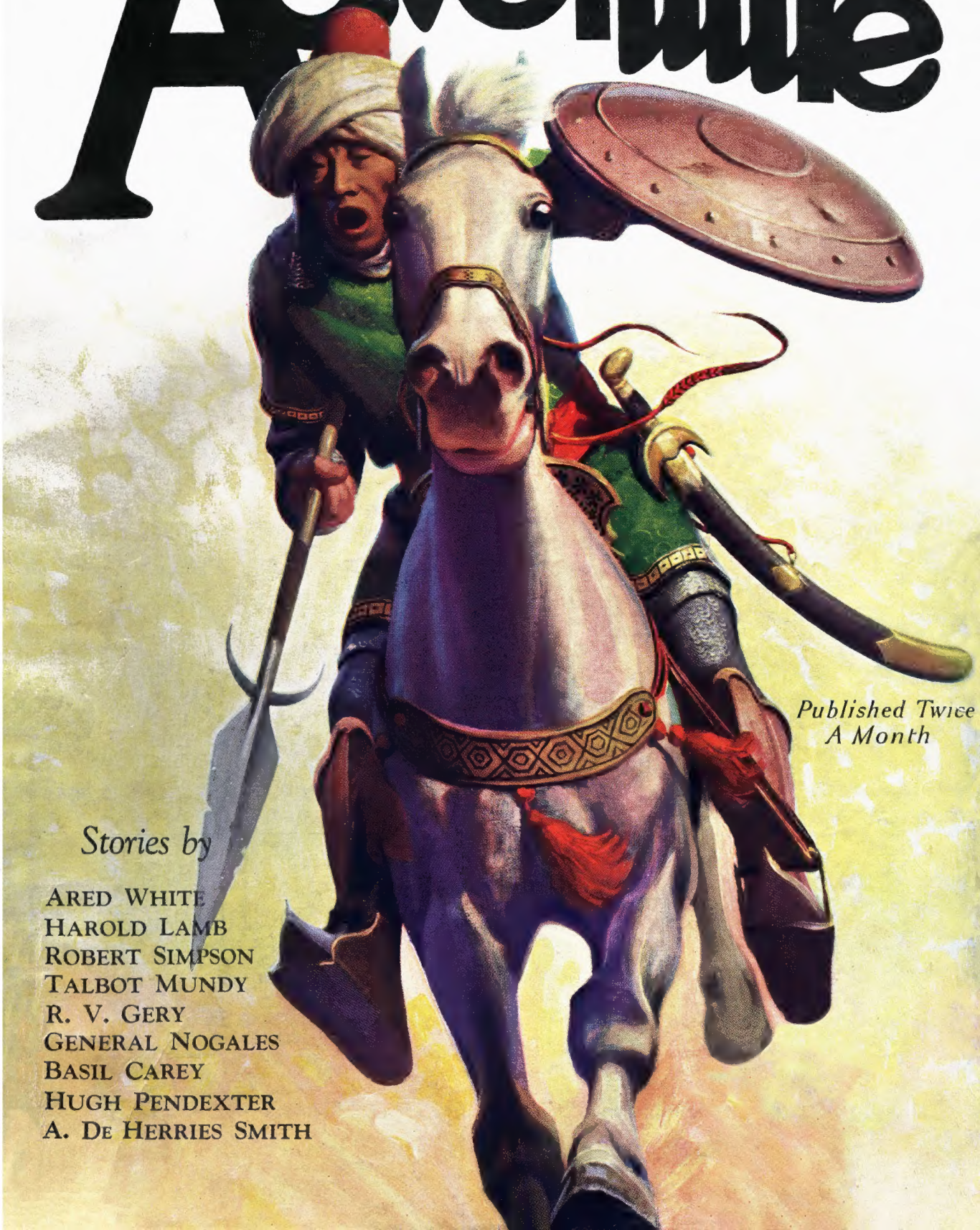

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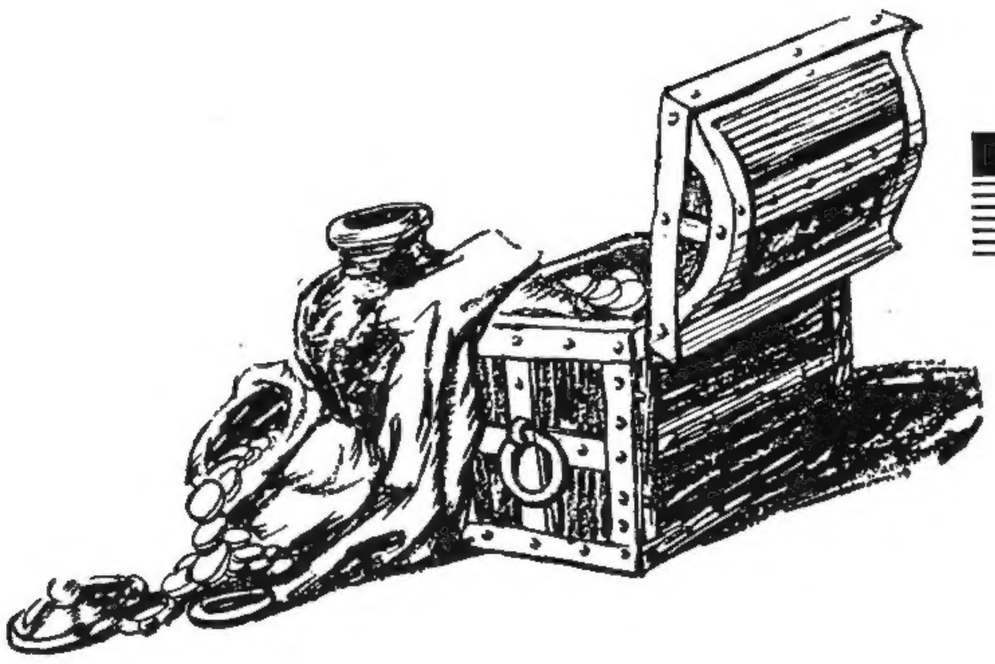

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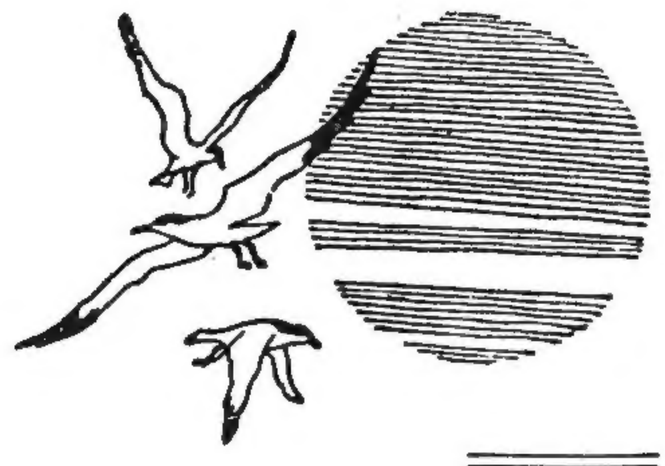

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CONTENTS

1931 for February 15th

VOL. LXXVII NO. 5

A. A. Proctor
EDITOR

The Left Hand Of Bendi . . . . ROBERT SIMPSON 2
A Story of West Africa

Cain's Reef . . . . . R. V. GERY 24
A Novelette of the South Pacific

Beauséant Goes Forward . . . . HAROLD LAMB 53
A Narrative of the Crusades

Devil Buster . . . . . ARED WHITE 59
A Story of the World War

When Whalers Go Ashore (*A Poem*) . KNUD ANDERSEN 68

King Of The World . . . . . TALBOT MUNDY 69
Conclusion of a Novel of Egypt and Tibet

North Bounty . . . . . A. deHERRIES SMITH 97
A Story of the Canadian Wilds

A Living Tomb . . . . . CAPTAIN MANSFIELD 105

Port Arthur . . . . . GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES 106
Manchurian Adventures of a Noted Soldier of Fortune

The Real King Of Birds . . . . WYMAN SIDNEY SMITH 117

Traitor's Bane . . . . . BASIL CAREY 118
A Novel of the South Sea Rovers Three Parts—Part I

Phantom Messenger . . . . . HUGH PENDEXTER 152
A Novelette of the Guerrillas of the Civil War

The Camp-fire 181 Ask Adventure 186 Trail Ahead 192

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A Story of the Palm Oil Rivers

By

ROBERT SIMPSON

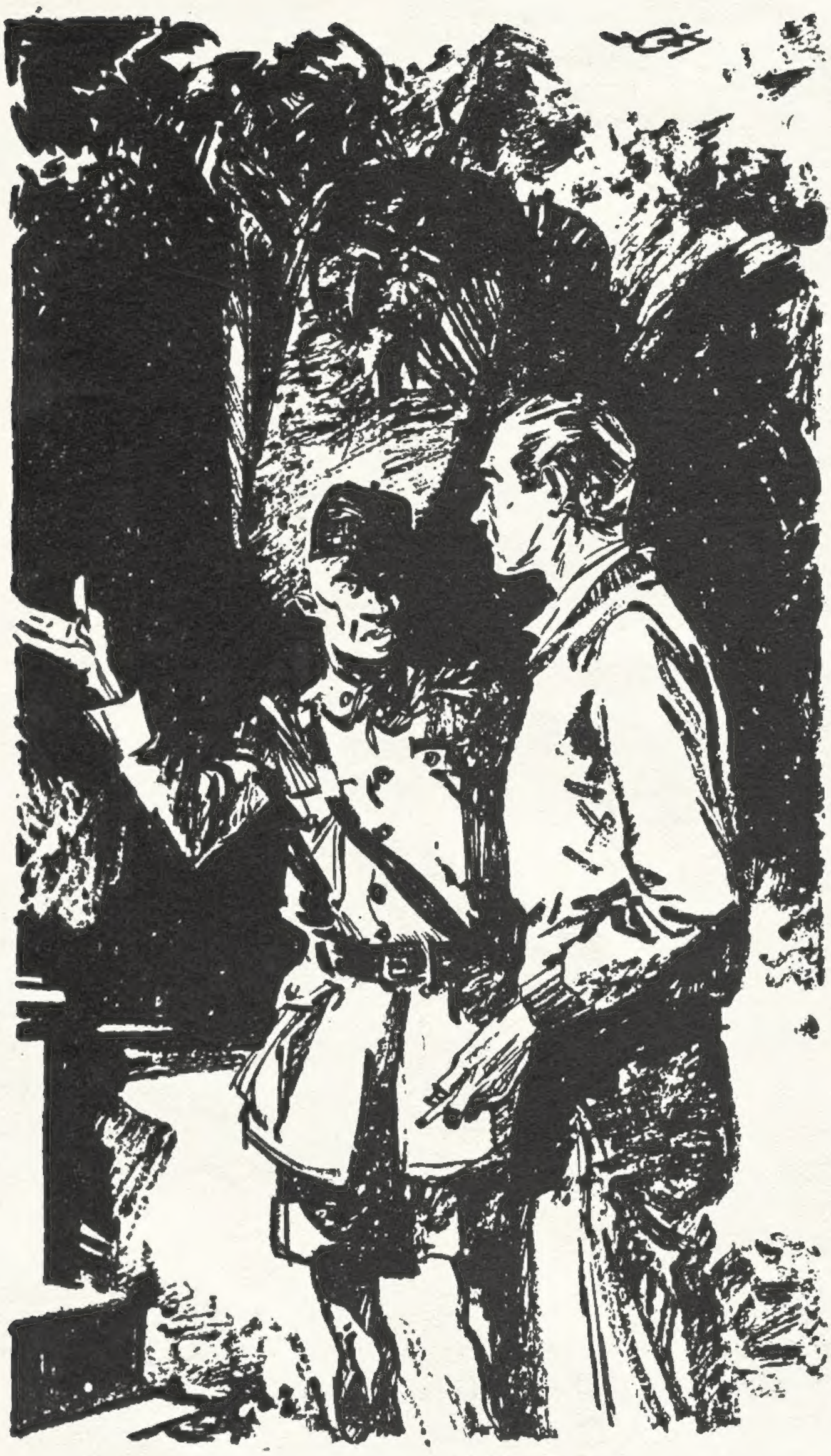
BENDI was a good god.

Along the sullen, mangrove bound creeks of the Niger Delta, where the jungles of Benin creep down toward the sea, the house of Bendi was the house of sanctuary, and even to touch this god's right hand was equivalent to a pardon for all offenses.

Usually his votaries came to him with treachery and violence and passion racing at their heels, their eyes bulging in their sockets, their breath whistling in their throats and, having gripped Bendi's right hand, they found quiet and peace again and presently departed without fear of any penalties or punishments.

For, as all good right hands have always been since Old Mother Niger's tears first began to water the palms and mangroves of the Slave Coast, the right hand of Bendi was the hand of friendship and peace and of all things that were opposed to such left handed impulses as enmity and hate and vengeance and man's inhumanities to man.

Unfortunately, Crammond, who was a commissioner in the Nigerian service, did not know this. He knew nothing whatever of Bendi or his house, or his beneficent right hand. Consequently, of course,



The Left Hand of Bendi

Crammond did not know that Bendi also had a left hand—a concealed left hand that, if mentioned at all, was referred to only by a sign.

And not even the awful vengeance of the crocodile pool beyond Saganna was held in greater fear than the vengeance of the Left Hand of Bendi.

Crammond's headquarters fronted on Okali Creek. The district was officially known as Doli and, until quite recently, had been governed rather vaguely from Sapeli or Benin City or both; no one seemed to know which, least of all Crammond.

There was, however, some excuse for Crammond. A cog in the mysteriously operating mechanism of government, Crammond had been ordered up from remote Degama to officiate as the Doli district's first commissioner. So that there was really no reason why Crammond should have known anything about the place or its people; nothing, that is, except that the place was very much "bush" and that the people were of alleged Bini extraction, with a strongly suspected dash of Igabo and Sobo thrown in.

Scattered at vantage points throughout the district, and principally in the vi-

cinity of Okali Creek, were the establishments of several Liverpool trading firms; and at five-thirty on a Friday morning, when the New Year was just a few days old, Crammond, still half asleep, stepped from his gig boat on to the Bennett Company's gig wharf.

The ghostly chill of a Harmattan mist hung over Okali Creek, clothing mangrove and palm and the corrugated iron roofs of the Bennett warehouses with spectral gloom. Crammond wore a winter overcoat and shivered even in that; and the promise of sizzling, equatorial midsummer heat within the space of two or three hours did not compensate him for the fact that he had been awakened from a sound and satisfying sleep to take official cognizance of a particularly nasty murder.

Crammond did not like murder mysteries. He did not like murders whether they were mysterious or not. And this murder, if the Bennett beach Kroo-boy and Dolman's note could be believed, was an unusually ugly performance.

So it was in a rather disgruntled state of mind that he followed the Kroo houseboy up the gravel path from the gig wharf to the stairway that led up to the white men's living quarters above the Bennett Company's trading shop.

"Hello, Crammond. Sorry to rout you out at this ungodly hour. Hellish cold, isn't it?"

Crammond looked up toward the veranda rail overhead and found Dolman, the fat and usually genial agent for the Bennett Company and one of his assistants, named Park, looking glumly down.

"Hello, Dolman. 'Lo, Park. What's happened? Where's the—"

"Better have a drink first," Dolman suggested. "You'll probably need it. Whisky or brandy?"

"Brandy, thanks. What's happened?"

"You'll see for yourself in time enough," Dolman said wryly. "It's still on the oil yard fence. I haven't touched it."

And when Crammond had had his drink, Dolman carried the brandy bottle and a glass along with him as the commissioner and he trooped downstairs and walked toward the oil yard, which was flanked by warehouses and protected front and rear by a high fence of strong barbed wire.

PRESENTLY Crammond discovered that "it" *was* still on the oil yard fence; a Thing that had been a man, flung spreadeagle fashion, something like a tattered dish rag that had been carelessly hung up to dry. Perhaps it was the shifting yet clinging mist that gave it the appearance of hanging in wispy strips that seemed to break off like tired gray threads and float . . .

Crammond shivered and looked quickly at Dolman's bottle of brandy; and he did not bother about the glass Dolman had brought with him.

"Who is he?" he asked after a while.

"A Bini oil trader of mine. Kardi's his name. Good for ten puncheons a week. This thing will knock hell out of my business."

Crammond turned his back on the oil yard fence and faced the waterfront.

"Have some one cover it up and take it down and bury it," he said at last. "I've seen enough."

"That sounds easy," Dolman said. "But that's where our trouble really begins. Who's going to take it down?"

"Why? Hasn't he any people? Canoe boys?"

"If they were here at all, they've gone. Vanished like smoke. And my Bini beach boys have gone with them. Don't you see anything odd about that breakwater down there? It's just an hour or so before we open up for business."

Crammond peered through the misty whiteness of the Harmattan at the mangrove stick breakwater and immediately gathered Dolman's meaning. The breakwater, normally crowded with trade canoes waiting for the new day's business to begin, was deserted.

"Hunh," Crammond conceded. "Looks bad for business, doesn't it?"

"Bad! This thing's going to cost me—

Oh, blast their ruddy *juju* palavers anyway!"

"*Juju?*"

"Certainly. No private grudge would tear a man in strips like that and hang him on my fence. That's *juju* sure enough. A curse on him and on me."

"You! Why the devil—?"

"I don't know," Dolman said and shrugged his fat shoulders hopelessly. "You never know when you are stepping on the ruddy toes of one of their *juju* gods."

Crammond glanced briefly—very briefly—toward the fence again.

"Better get it out of sight before this mist lifts and the sun breaks through. Perhaps your Kroo-boys—"

"They will if I say so. But you don't see any of them around, do you?"

Crammond didn't. Even the Kroo watchboys, still on duty, were apparently confining their attentions to quarters of the beach that did not bring the oil yard fence within their range of vision.

"All right," Crammond said after hesitating a moment or two. "Cover it up, meantime, and I'll have my Yoruba corporal take charge of the job of getting rid of it. He probably won't mind. When did it happen?"

Dolman shook his head.

"I don't know. One of my watchboys woke me up and told me somebody was hanging dead on the oil yard fence. He doesn't know how it happened or how the thing got there. Says he heard nothing and saw nothing until he went to ring that bell."

Dolman indicated a ship's bell that hung just outside the oil yard gate; a bell that was supposed to be rung, ship fashion, every half hour during the night, but which, most of the time, was rung only when the chronically sleepy watchboys happened to think about it.

Crammond glanced at the bell, then turned abruptly in the general direction of the gig wharf.

"What time was that?"

"Shortly after four o'clock. That's when he woke me up."

"Hardly two hours ago," Crammond said, producing a cigaret case and pausing beside a water tank to light up. "Any canoes alongside your breakwater before that?"

"Lots of them. They begin coming alongside soon after sundown, you know."

Crammond nodded and moved on again.

"That poor devil's canoes—what did you say his name was?"

"Kardi."

"Were his canoes alongside the breakwater?"

"The watchboys don't know."

"You've questioned them?"

"Asked them everything. They don't know anything about any of the canoes that were alongside the breakwater before it happened."

"Or they don't want to know?"

"Possibly."

"Hunh."

CRAMMOND halted at the foot of the stairway leading up to Dolman's living quarters. The assistant, named Park, and another younger assistant, who was unknown to Crammond, leaned over the veranda rail overhead. Crammond glanced up at them inquiringly.

"I don't suppose you fellows can throw any light on this thing?"

Park looked toward his companion and said to Crammond—

"This is Gordon, our junior assistant."

Crammond acknowledged the introduction with a friendly nod.

"Newcomer, aren't you?"

"Just out, sir," Gordon confessed, then glanced toward Park who nudged him and nodded assent to something or other Gordon seemed to have on his mind.

"I don't suppose it means much, sir," Gordon offered hesitatingly. "But I had a rotten toothache and couldn't sleep very well, and I heard a perfectly furious sound of paddling and got up to see what it was all about."

"Paddling? Canoes, you mean?"

"Yes. As if dozens of canoes were

getting underway at once. It was too dark and the mist was too thick for me to see anything from the rail here, and I didn't go down to the beach. But it was all over in a few minutes in any case—the paddling, I mean. The curiously hoarse, snarling sound—"

"What snarling sound?"

"I don't know, sir. An odd sound it was—half animal, half human, it seemed —a sound I've never heard before except perhaps in a zoo."

"Zoo!"

Gordon looked bothered—as if he were afraid his inexperience and lack of actual information might put everybody on the wrong track.

"Well, you see, sir," he said with obvious caution, "I'm unfamiliar with—er—sounds of the sort out here. It came after the paddling sound—at least I'm not sure that I heard it at all until the sound of the paddles died down a bit. There was the sound of voices, too, whispering and whimpering, it seemed to me, in fear. But that quickly passed and I got the impression that everybody was paddling like blazes and using his breath for that alone. Then, out of all this, as it were, came the vicious, snarling of something or other—a sound, if I may say so, sir, that sort of tore things to bits."

Crammond looked sharply at Dolman, and the trading agent returned the compliment.

"The description certainly fits," Dolman said significantly after a moment or two. "Tore things to bits is right. Ugh!"

Crammond nodded and stroked his chin reflectively; and Gordon added with dubious hesitation—

"Perhaps the mist or a bit of rising ground lent height to the giant-like creature I got a glimpse of when—when it was all over, and I wouldn't—"

"Giant! What giant!"

"I'm not sure, sir. Nothing was very distinct. But everything and everybody else seemed to be on the ground. You know—normal size? But this man or priest or god or whatever he was—and he suggested some sort of religion or secret society or something of the sort—his head climbed into the air so that it was almost or seemed to be on a level with this veranda."

"What! You don't expect me to believe—"

"No, sir. I don't believe it very much myself," Gordon said simply. "But I saw this thing—if I really did see it—because it was on a level with my eyes. It sort of climbed out of the mist at me for a second or two and then swirled away again—or the mist swirled thicker about it and blotted it out. Something like that."

Crammond glanced doubtfully up at Gordon.

"Quite sure that toothache of yours wasn't helping your imagination a little?"

Gordon smiled.

"I hardly think so, sir, because when everything was quiet again, I found that my toothache was gone."

"That's fine," Crammond said with a dry smile. "I'm glad this beastly affair brought some luck to some one. When did all this happen?"

"According to my watch, between three-forty-five and four o'clock, sir."

"Hunh." Crammond again looked significantly toward Dolman. "Dovetails all right. And your watchboys are lying when they say they heard nothing. Better grill them a bit more and see if you can get anything out of them. Does that snarling, tearing sound mean anything to you?"

Dolman shook his head.

"Not a ruddy thing—not since the poor devil was left hanging on a barbed wire fence. Want to go topside and have another drink while I send for the watchboys?"

"No, thanks. I'd better run along and get my Yoruba corporal on the job. I'll probably be back later in the day and you can tell me then if you've learned anything new. Meantime, if you have any other sources of information that can be tapped, please do so."

"Surely. I'll do my damnedest. Thanks

for coming along so early. I'm sorry I had to wake you up to bother you with a thing like this."

Crammond waved Dolman's thanks and apologies aside, nodded to Park and Gordon and turned sharply toward the gig wharf. About a dozen steps away he stopped and looked back at Dolman, who was halfway up the stairs.

"What did you say the fellow's name was?"

"Kardi."

"What village?"

"Mena-Mena."

"All right—thanks."

Crammond disappeared around the corner of the house, and presently was stepping into the gig boat that, when he did not find a canoe more suitable to the needs of the moment, served to carry him hither and yon upon such vitally important affairs of state as early morning murders and dinner and stud poker at Marsden's beach.

He observed, when he took his place in the gig, that his crew of native oarsmen were more than anxious to put Bennett's beach behind them as quickly as possible. Also such questions as he put to the heavy shouldered boatswain of the gig were answered in discouraging monosyllables or not at all. And the clinging whiteness of the Harmattan mist, that would vanish with wraithlike suddenness when the sun came up, still hung over the waters of Okali Creek like a shroud.

Presently he reached his own beach—a small, palm dotted clearing, with a pitch pine and corrugated iron bungalow in the center and a grouping of miscellaneous buildings scattered about it, most of them of mud and thatch. And his first order on his arrival was given to a Yoruba corporal of the W. A. F. F. (West African Frontier Force) who, in due course, proceeded with three privates to perform a solemn duty that awaited them at Bennett's beach.

They did not, however, accept the assignment with their customary sphinx-like indifference. Even the corporal, whose name was Modo and who was accustomed to most of the more ghastly effects of native warfare and "*juju* palaver," seemed to feel that the Bennett beach affair was just a trifle beyond the pale of propriety.

However, he and his men departed in a canoe with a piece of sailcloth and a needle and some thread to match; and in the succeeding hour a bundle wrapped in sailcloth was dropped over the side of a canoe in the middle of Okali Creek, where the lifting Harmattan mist was still thick enough to throw a screen around the ceremony.

Before the sun broke through and flung the white shroud aside, there was not a ripple to mark the spot where Kardi the oil trader had found such rest as came to one who had passed into the land of spirits like a torn leaf that hurtles through space in the teeth of a tropical tornado.

CRAMMOND headed for Mena-Mena Creek that evening shortly after dinner. Lolling on the little awning covered deck of an eight-paddle canoe, smoking a curved stemmed pipe with a huge bowl, he kept himself wreathed in a cloud of smoke that discouraged the majority of mosquitoes while he tried to convince himself that the village of Mena-Mena would be more communicative than any one else had been.

Several native chiefs who had visited district headquarters throughout the day and other lesser natives who were supposed to be useful in providing government officers with strictly private information on matters assumably secret and mysterious, had proved altogether barren of even a suggestion that might have helped to explain the Kardi affair.

Dolman's watchboys had persisted in declaring that they had seen and heard nothing, and even the threat of a flogging for negligence in the exercise of their duty —which was, of course, to see and hear everything—had not induced them to make any changes in their original story. And such native traders as Dolman and Park had been able to question, as well

as those questioned by other trading agents and their assistants, had produced not a shred of any kind of evidence.

Young Gordon's rather vague contact with the mysterious business was the only informative hint Crammond had thus far secured; this and the fact that the Bennett Company's beach had been deserted all day and seemed likely to remain so until the curse or *tabu* or whatever it was had been removed.

Naturally, in these circumstances, Dolman was badly worried. He did not know and could not make even the vaguest guess at the reason why his beach had been selected for such special and undesirable attention, because Kardi had traded at other beaches as well as at the Bennett beach even though the Bennett Company had received the bulk of the oil trader's business.

Dolman, of course, tried to give the impression that "it was all in the day's work," that his fears were strictly business fears and that he did not really expect Crammond to be able to do very much to straighten things out for him—Crammond or any one else.

"That *juju* stuff is queer stuff," he had said resignedly to Crammond at four o'clock "small chop" that afternoon. "It looks crazy sometimes. Sometimes vicious and brutal and bloody and nothing but, and sometimes there's just no sense in it at all. But there is always a reason for everything these fellows do and when they hung that poor devil on my fence like that, well—" Dolman had shrugged his fat shoulders—"what's the answer?"

Nobody seemed to know; and since the universal native point of view was that the matter should promptly be dropped and forgotten, Crammond had decided that his visit to Mena-Mena had better be made under cover of darkness.

Also that, as far as this was possible, he had better go alone. For even Corporal Modo, in his own expressive, expressionless way, had given Crammond clearly to understand that it would be well to allow the why and the wherefor of Kardi's strange and awful death to rest with him at the bottom of Okali Creek.

"Maybe so," Modo said dubiously, "I catch trouble for that bury palaver. Bini man catch plenty bad *juju* for soldier man."

Consequently, except for the necessary paddle boys, Crammond lolled on the deck of the canoe alone.

The paddle boys, who had been oarsmen in the morning, did not seem to mind taking him to Mena-Mena. The place, apparently, had little or no significance as far as they were concerned; much less than the Bennett beach had had that morning.

Five of the boys, including the boatswain, were of the Bini breed, two were Igabo, and one was a Sobo from the Sapeli district. This Sobo's name was Bed and he had once been a native market scout and runner for a trading firm in Warri. The reason for his presence in the Doli district was not quite clear, but Crammond had a suspicion that Bed's favorite wife had been bought simply and inexpensively with love instead of, more properly, with palm oil or rubber and that it would not be advisable for Bed to allow the lady's father to catch up with him.

Just what Bed's other wife or wives thought of the matter, Crammond did not know and he certainly was not bothering about it then. But, glancing under the grass awning at the four paddle boys behind him and then forward at the four in front, he was glad Bed was among them and that Bed was a canoe boy of much and varied experience.

CRAMMOND planned, when he came in sight of Mena-Mena, to leave the paddle boys in the canoe and make a strictly personal call upon the late Kardi's wives and family. Perhaps, with the right sort of persuasion, they would tell him something about the murdered man's habits—particularly such habits as might have involved the Bennett beach and been most likely to create violent enmities.

However, Crammond did not anticipate very much luck in this direction and as he had never been to Mena-Mena before, he realized that his plan was subject to change without much notice. In the Doli district, as Crammond had already discovered elsewhere in the Niger Delta, the expected, when it happened, was mostly the unexpected.

He had brought with him two hurricane lanterns, also his service revolver which reposed in its holster as usual, and an automatic which he carried inside his shirt. One hurricane lantern would light his way into Mena-Mena and the other, which would be left in the canoe, would, he hoped, guide him on his way out. The guns were merely a precaution and, if anything unusual transpired, Crammond frankly expected to have more trouble holding his canoe boys together than in getting into or out of the village of Mena-Mena.

However, the measured dip of the paddles did not falter when the canoe's nose finally swung into the broad black sweep of Mena-Mena Creek where the lights of a trading station twinkled faintly on a far distant curve, and the ponderous black shapes of oil canoes wallowed laboriously in the midstream swell.

Crammond's canoe clung to the shadows of the eternal mangroves, slipping noiselessly past other slower moving craft that loitered on the way to trading beach or native market, with all the hours of the night to draw upon.

And, presently and quietly, and apparently without attracting the attention of even the kernel laden canoe that happened to be passing at the moment, Crammond's canoe turned into a narrower, blacker creek that was known as the little Mena-Mena—the creek that led directly to the ramshackle mangrove stick breakwater that fronted the village of Mena-Mena.

Still Crammond's canoe boys did not seem to have any objection to finishing the job they had undertaken. Kardi might be damned, and any contact with his mutilitated body might be taboo, but apparently the curse did not extend to his home town. In fact, as Crammond presently discovered when the canoe finally ran alongside Mena-Mena's breakwater, his paddle boys seemed to be privileged in performing a duty that was no surprise to any one—least of all to the solemn delegation that respectfully met and welcomed Crammond at the breakwater!

Perhaps a dozen natives of lesser or greater importance, with a dozen voices that all tried to speak at once, loomed in a black knot before Crammond's eyes. Behind them, the hodge-podge of mud and thatch that was Mena-Mena glowed faintly in the light of several low and slow burning fires. Grouped about these fires, some of the rank and file of the village's population squatted like dumb puppets in a marionette show, and vaguely, in the shadow of mud walls, other figures sprawled in full bellied slumber—just as they probably did every night of their lives.

Nothing out of the way. No gloom. No wailing women. No sacrificial victims hanging by their necks from trees to keep out the evil spirit of Kardi and the devils that had wrought his doom. No hapless paddle boy slaves of Kardi's head and hands being hurled into any Pit of the Damned to keep him company. Nothing like this. None of the things Crammond had heard about but had never really seen.

Kardi was dead. He had gone out into the deepest blackness of Outer Damnation, and apparently Kardi's people and Mena-Mena in general were perfectly willing to put a period on the whole affair and regard it as finished business.

In fact, Crammond got the decided impression that Mena-Mena had been in a gala humor and was, for the time being at least, merely pausing to do honor to a white man who happened to be a government commissioner.

And, of course, no one knew or was in the least likely to know, then or later, just what had happened to Kardi or why it had happened on the Bennett Company's trading beach. Mena-Mena's ignorance

on this vexed question was profound.

The light of one of Crammond's hurricane lanterns searched the faces of the delegation one by one, and he found among them faces that were fairly familiar to him and none that showed the slightest trace of fear or any kind of anxiety whatever. Mena-Mena's hands were quite clean, Mena-Mena's conscience was clear and Mena-Mena's people were at peace with the government and with the world.

The principal spokesman of the delegation who was named Oyani, and who said he was the eldest son of the aged chief of the place, told Crammond that his father was in bed asleep, but could be awakened if Crammond insisted upon it.

Crammond did not insist. Whereupon Oyani and his reception committee offered to show Crammond the town; offered him and his canoe boys food and drink, and when this was regretfully refused, Oyani not only allowed but also encouraged Crammond to stroll wherever he wished.

So Crammond strolled. He did not expect to find anything in the midst of so much bland indifference to fear, or to see anything that was particularly new to him. But above all the other insalubrious odors that assailed his more than usually sensitive nostrils, he thought he detected the odor of smoldering thatch—something like the smell of burning peat—and without having anything definitely in mind, he strolled in search of it.

THROUGH primitive squalor and smells, past lingering fires and the log-like shadows of men who snored serenely in the dust beside them, Crammond moved in and out of a jumble of mud and thatch huts that, for the greater part, huddled together in clusters in a kind of fearful confusion.

Startled live stock scurrying hither and thither, squalling infants being quieted by the lifting voices of irate mothers who wanted to sleep, the grunting of pigs and perhaps of men, the yelp of fleeing bush dogs, the distant chatter of monkeys, the offended squawkings of the parrot family—all of the usual things sweltering and wallowing together under cover of the African night; this and the persistent and dominant odor of burning thatch.

And presently vagrant wisps of smoke stung Crammond's nostrils and in another minute or so he was standing before the smoking ruins of what had very recently been a cluster of huts around a much larger hut which had held aloof from its neighbors by secluding itself within a compound; the compound of a man of wealth and no little importance.

Crammond's hurricane lantern showed him that the place was a wreck; that every hut had been razed to the ground, the thatch set on fire and everything within the huts smashed or burned to a cinder. The scarred and twisted remnants of trading beach furniture, bits of broken crockery and of iron cooking pots, the barrel of a muzzle loading gun and the charred, indistinguishable face of an idol or a god of some sort—these were some of the testimonials of complete destruction that mingled together among the wet mud and damp thatch that still smoldered in a kind of sullen defiance.

"Him catch fire too much," Oyani offered in bland explanation. "Him fa' down. Fire palaver be no good."

Crammond nodded.

"So I see. Which man own this house before it fall down?"

As Crammond asked this question he held up his hurricane lantern again and peered into the faces round about him; faces that smiled a sort of stock smile or remained passively impervious to any scrutiny.

"Be Kardi catch um," Oyani said simply.

"Kardi, eh? And which man burn him up? Which man make Kardi house fall down?"

No one knew. Perhaps it had been a *juju* fire palaver god that had done it, because, of course, no one in Mena-Mena had entered Kardi's house or had touched it in any way.

"And Kardi's family?" Crammond persisted dryly. "Him wives? Him sons? Him daughters? Which place they go?"

"Dey done go 'way."

"Where?"

"We no *savez*. No man *savez* dat. Dey done take canoe and go 'way."

Crammond's hurricane lantern took another look at the ruins of Kardi's house and still another searching scrutiny of the face of Oyani and of his reception committee.

"Hunh. You're a bland bunch of liars. I'll say that much for you." Then, more sharply, "How you *savez* I come foh dis place dis time?"

Oyani smiled an empty smile and explained smoothly that a canoe boy had seen Crammond's canoe approaching and had raced into the village with the news that the white government commissioner was coming.

This was plausible enough, but Crammond did not believe it. It was much more probable that some one on his own beach had made known to Oyani or to some one in authority in Mena-Mena, his intention to visit the village which could be reached more quickly, even if more laboriously, on foot than by canoe.

Crammond turned away from the ruins of Kardi's house and said abruptly—

"I go foh canoe."

"Yessah. One time, sah," Oyani agreed just a trifle too hastily, and promptly led the way back to the creekside. Then, when they paused beside the battered mangrove stick breakwater, Oyani said regretfully, "Kardi palaver be no good. It make plenty trouble foh Mena-Mena long time. Now Kardi done die. Him house done fa' down. Him family done go 'way. Palaver set?"

There was a hopeful look in Oyani's eyes when he said this; a look that asked Crammond to give Mena-Mena a clean bill and allow the village to sleep in peace.

"What about Bennett's beach?" Crammond asked sharply. "Palaver set for Dolman breakwater and oil yard?"

Oyani's face clouded and there arose an unintelligible muttering from among the group behind him.

"We no *savez* Bennett beach palaver," and there was a glum sounding note in his voice. "Maybe so *juju* live dere. Maybe so *juju* make trouble foh Dolman. Some time *juju* make trouble foh white man and white man beach. But dat be Dolman palaver. Mena-Mena no catch trouble foh dat."

"No? Maybe Mena-Mena catch plenty trouble for that palaver if some man no talk true plenty quick," Crammond said dryly. "Which man hang Kardi on Bennett beach oil yard fence?"

"Be *juju!*"

"Rot! Be man. Plenty man."

"Be *juju!* I swear! I—"

"Shut up! I want true talk. *Savez?*"

"Be *juju!* No man do um! No man fit to do um! Be *juju!*"

"What *juju?*"

THERE was a dead silence; a silence so deep and breathless that Crammond thought he heard the ticking of his wrist watch as he held up the hurricane lantern to peer into the saturnine faces round about. And on every face there was an oddly intent look—a listening look that seemed to be frozen there, while the index finger of every left hand touched each man's closed lips with a quick, yet sealing pressure that was significant of eternal silence.

Crammond had the uncomfortable sensation that he had suddenly been thrust out into the dark and that he was alone out there. Even his canoe boys were not with him, for a quick glance behind him revealed to him that the canoe boys also were making the same sign and were wearing the same look; that is, all of them except Bed.

Bed was sitting on the mangrove stick breakwater brushing his teeth with the well chewed end of a native root, and apparently he was as far out in the dark as Crammond. However, he was not worrying about it. That he was a Sobo from somewhere east of Sapeli evidently made

him as much of an infidel, where Bini *juju* matters were concerned, as Crammond himself. So Crammond, after a moment's hesitation, said to him directly:

"All right, Bed. We go now."

"Yessah."

Bed came quickly to his feet and Crammond swung toward Oyani.

"I go. Some time, maybe so, I come back. Palaver set for this time."

"Yessah," Oyani agreed promptly, and smiled that same stock smile. "All man foh Mena-Mena be friend foh gov'ment long time."

Crammond hoped so for Mena-Mena's sake, though the memory of the ruins of Kardi's house was not a convincing argument in the village's favor. However, he realized there was not much of anything he could do about it just then and, once more lolling on the little deck of the eight paddle canoe, he left the squalor of Mena-Mena and the persistent odor of smoldering thatch behind him.

Presently he fell to wondering if Dolman of the Bennett Company really did not know why his beach had been linked up with the terrible *juju* vengeance that had been wrought upon Kardi and his house.

There was no doubt about the fact that Dolman was worried, and all of this worry was not because of the effect the affair had had and was likely to continue to have upon the Bennett Company's business. That afternoon when Crammond had taken small chop with Dolman there had been a look in the fat trading agent's eyes that suggested that Dolman was trying to make light of the personal element in the matter and was not succeeding very well.

Thinking of this led Crammond to wonder if Bed would be likely to be at all communicative. For although Bed was a Sobo, and his speech, like that of the Igabo people, was borrowed from one of the five Bini dialects, his personal and tribal *jujus* seemed to be different. And it was just possible, because of his long and intimate association with the white man, and with white traders in particular, that he might be willing to supply at least a native mental angle that would be both illuminating and useful.

Corporal Modo, of course, was also a native, and a Yoruba and a government officer to boot; and the Yoruba people were the only people in Southern Nigeria that boasted a written language. This superiority, however, had not made Modo any more communicative than any one of the Doli district's Bini chiefs, even though Modo had consented to obey orders that morning and act as undertaker.

So that Crammond did not anticipate much luck in questioning Bed when he had the canoe boy come into his living room and set him to the wholly unnecessary task of cleaning a Winchester rifle.

However Bed asked no questions. He squatted where Crammond told him to squat and, while Crammond busied himself with some reports, Bed went to work. Presently, apparently intent upon what he was writing, Crammond asked in a low monotone—

"Sobo *juju* be different from Bini and Igabo *juju?*"

"Yessah," Bed answered and Crammond noted with a sense of great relief that the canoe boy did not look up. "All man *juju* be different but some time Igabo and Bini be same."

Crammond's pen scratched along for a line or two.

"Bini *juju* fit to make trouble for white man?"

"Yessah, Benin Ci' *juju* make plenty trouble foh white man before big gun catch um. You 'membah?"

Crammond remembered. He had not been among those present at the "Benin City Massacre" which had passed into history contemporary with the Spanish-American and the Boer wars, but he had heard enough about it, and the story of the ruthless slaughter of white men and Kroo-boys was not a pretty one. Certainly he had no wish for history of that sort to repeat itself on Okali Creek.

There was another and a thoughtful pause in which Crammond apparently finished one page and started on another.

"Trade canoe done go away from Bennett beach. Which time they come back?"

Bed was studying the breech of the gun very intently. Quite evidently he was no stranger to a breechloader, even though a breechloader in a native's possession was against the law.

"Maybe so dey neber come back," he said as if he were talking to the gun. "Dis *juju* be bad *juju* foh white man. Be besser Mas' Dolman go 'way."

"Why?" Crammond had stopped writing but Bed went calmly on cleaning the gun.

"Maybe so, Mas' Dolman go die. Maybe so, if he no go 'way, Bennett beach go burn and fa' down all same Kardi house."

Crammond's chin jerked upward. But Bed was not looking at him. The canoe boy's finger lingered almost affectionately on the trigger of the Winchester and he was peering along the barrel toward one of the windows that faced the creek.

"Sof'ly, sof'ly. Make book. Make plenty book," he cautioned in a very low voice. "Bendi left hand no catch tongue, but Bendi left eye be all same white man *juju* glass and Bendi left ear fit to hear egret feather fa' down."

CRAMMOND'S pen scratched again rather hurriedly and feverishly. Bendi? Who the devil was Bendi? Bendi, whose left hand had no tongue, but whose left eye was like a telescope or a magnifying glass, or both, and whose left ear could hear the fall of an egret feather. Bendi? Left handed, left eyed, left eared and without a tongue.

No tongue? No—Oyani's listening look and the index finger of the left hand on the closed lips? Silence. A silence that shut out all the world, while the eye and ear looked and listened and saw and heard all things.

That gesture of Oyani and his friends—so unanimous and so spontaneous—had been a sign; a sign that was probably known and understood by every Bini and Igabo everywhere. It had been no secret to Bed or to any one of his, Crammond's, canoe boys. And if what had happened to Kardi and his house was any criterion, this left handed *juju* was a particularly popular and vicious one that, as sometimes happened when the designs of such a *juju* were interfered with, was likely to shake the peace of the district and perhaps even the whole province to its foundations unless—

"Bendi?" Crammond repeated in a very low voice. "Be Bini god palaver?"

"Yessah."

"You *savez* um?"

"Li'l bit."

"You fear?"

"All man fear Bendi."

Crammond made an appearance of reading the page he had just written.

"All Yoruba man fear him?"

"Yessah."

"Modo?"

"Yessah. Modo fear he catch trouble foh dat bury palaver."

"Hunh. This Bendi deity seems to be quite autocratic," Crammond mumbled to himself and reached for his pipe, which he thoughtfully refilled while Bed busied himself with the rifle. "When he says hands off that goes for everybody apparently, and even white men—"

The sudden hurried crunch of booted feet on the gravel path leading up from the gig wharf to the bungalow halted Crammond, and even Bed looked up sharply.

"White man come," he announced, knowing that only white men in these parts wore shoes. "I go?"

"Wait," Crammond said and rose, absently letting his hand fall to rest on the butt of his service revolver. Then, realizing that this was a rather jumpy gesture, he lighted his pipe and, through a cloud of smoke, saw young Gordon of Bennett's beach throw open his living room door with a shove that did not stand on ceremony.

"Hello, Gordon. What's the trouble? You look—"

"Can—can you come at once?" Gordon said in a whispering voice that gasped for breath.

"Where?"

"Down to our beach. Dolman seems to be going out of his head. Mostly just after dinner when he seemed to go all to pieces. And there are figures—"

"Figures?"

"Shadowy figures standing up in canoes just far enough away from the breakwater to be unrecognizable. Our Krooboys are getting panicky and keep chattering about *juju* palaver. They seem to be most afraid of the early morning hours when the Harmattan mist will be thickest."

"You mean around four o'clock—about the time Kardi was killed?"

Gordon nodded.

"I imagine that's what is on their minds. Dolman's, too. Park and I can't seem to do anything with him or with the Krooboys. Perhaps if you would come down and—"

"Mas' Crammond!"

The thick voice of Corporal Modo sounded from the doorway leading out to the kitchen and every eye turned sharply in Modo's direction.

"Yes?" Crammond said a little testily. "What is it? Come in. What are you standing there for?"

"Sof'ly, sof'ly," Modo said and his voice held a low sepulchral note. "Plenty *juju* trouble live foh dis river. Be besser all man go 'way from Bennett beach. *Juju* go finis' um—so he go fa' down proper."

Crammond glanced significantly at Bed and then at Gordon.

"Did you understand what he said?" he asked the young man quietly.

"Surely," Gordon answered as if it were no surprise to him. "In the past hour or so everybody seems to have become quite sure that our beach is facing its finish and your corporal is just echoing what I've told you, though I don't know why he waited for this particular minute to—"

Crammond spun on Modo again.

"What's matter you talk foh dis time? Why you no talk before I go to Mena-Mena?"

Corporal Modo looked pained. His voice, when he spoke, was lower and more sepulchral than ever.

"Before you go foh Mena-Mena, I tell you be besser you no go dere. I tell you be besser you lef' dis Bini *juju* palaver foh one side."

"The devil! You don't suppose we're going to let those murdering beasts—" Crammond paused and lowered his voice. "What do you mean, Modo? Talk sense. You be soldier man. You be corporal. You want to run away?"

Modo, very carefully, did not commit himself.

"Bini *juju* no like gov'ment palaver. *Juju* angry too much foh dis time."

"Angry! About what? Because I went to Mena-Mena?"

"Yessah," Corporal Modo said respectfully. "Dis no be gov'ment palaver. Be Bini god palaver. Be so all Bini man say, and it be besser foh all white man and Kroo-boy to go 'way from Bennett beach foh dis night."

"Rubbish!" Crammond exploded and turned sharply toward Gordon. "How do you feel about it? And Park? And the other traders on the river? Have you talked to any of them since I was there this afternoon?"

GORDON hesitated. He was very young, very earnest, and very much aware of his own inexperience.

"Well, of course, sir, I'll do whatever the others do," he said simply at last. "Whatever's right. Taylor of Marsden's and Johnson of Barlow's were up this afternoon just after you'd gone and we know that they are with us, and Frazer of the African Merchants said if we needed any help to call on him."

"Fine! Have you sent those fellows word?"

"Park did just before I left to come up here."

"And nobody tried to prevent you from leaving your beach?"

"Nobody. In fact, those figures I spoke about just moved farther out into the river as if to avoid being recognized."

"Hunh. Biding their time, eh? All right. Modo!"

"Yessah."

Crammond paused, then spoke deliberately:

"We go take machine gun foh Bennett beach. All Yoruba man go dere with guns. Bini and Igabo man stay for dis place. *Savez?*"

"Ye-yessah," hesitatingly, and there followed a leaden pause. "You—you go fight Bini god palaver wif machine gun?"

"No. We go put machine gun for Bennett beach," Crammond declared carefully. "If Bini god palaver *juju* want to fight machine gun . . ." And Crammond shrugged his shoulders most impressively.

The whites of Modo's eyes gleamed for a moment like revolving lights and he mumbled an ejaculation in Yoruba that Crammond did not catch. Obviously, too, he had something on his mind, but was diffident about expressing himself.

"Well? What is it?" Crammond demanded. "Yoruba man fear to go to Bennett beach?"

"N-no, sah," Modo lied rather badly. "But—but I—I think so, sah, be besser suppose some man go to Sapeli for two, three more machine guns and plenty more soldier man."

Crammond stiffened a little, glanced quickly at Gordon and Bed and his hand once more trifled with the butt of his service revolver. He spoke to Gordon rather than to Modo and smiled.

"I think they'll hesitate a bit when they see we mean business." Then to Bed, who had finished "cleaning" the Winchester, "All right. We go. Put gun for Mas' Gordon boat and keep your eye out for it. *Savez?*"

Bed's expression was neutral even when he asked quietly—

"You want me come foh Bennett beach, sah?"

"Yes. I may need you."

"Yessah," Bed said very low and without waiting for any further instructions departed with the Winchester in the general direction of Gordon's gig boat.

Later, and not very much later, Crammond and Gordon followed the Sobo to the waterfront, while Modo and his squad and two orderlies—eleven fighting men in all—busied themselves with the job of transporting the machine gun and an almost pathetically inadequate supply of ammunition to Bennett's beach in a canoe.

Crammond arrived at his own gig wharf a step or two ahead of Gordon, saw that the Bennett beach gig crew were in their places and saw that his Winchester was propped against the tiller seat, but saw no sign of Bed.

He looked sharply around for the Sobo, then asked one of Gordon's Kroo-boys:

"Where Bed? The boy who bring this gun?"

"He done go," the Kroo-boy answered.

"Go where?"

"I no *savez*. He done take so-so two-paddle canoe and him woman and go 'way."

"Gone! Bed! Sloped!" Crammond turned to Gordon. "I'd have bet a month's pay on that boy. Wonder why he didn't take the gun?"

"I don't know, sir," Gordon answered thoughtfully. "Perhaps—" Gordon stopped as if afraid he were talking too much.

"Perhaps what? Why don't you finish it? Getting rattled?"

Gordon's young face tightened.

"I don't think so, sir. I was just thinking he might have left the gun behind because—because he thought you might need it."

And after that came silence; a silence that seemed to descend upon Okali Creek like a pall.

FIREFLIES winked at young Gordon several hours later as he sat upon an upended kerosene can in the black shadows of the Bennett beach kernel store awning. Behind him there was a little knot of

Kroo-boys armed with machetes; Kroo-boys who whispered fearfully among themselves in spite of the rifle that lay across Gordon's knees and the revolver that was stuck in his belt. For this was not a matter to be met with guns or knives. It was *juju* and the worst possible kind of *juju* at that.

Upon Gordon's face was a pale set look that, every now and then, relaxed a little and he smiled. He was trying to think that the fireflies were a good omen; not because they were the least unusual but because they seemed to be heliographing a message of light in the midst of so much that was dark and fearsome and threateningly mysterious and invisible.

Because when this present blackness passed it would pass into the gray white mist of the Harmattan that would creep stealthily over river and beach smothering them in a ghostly wet blanket that would chill the unwary to the marrow. Then, out of this mist would come—

What?

Gordon did not know. No white man on the Bennett beach could do more than broadly guess at what they might expect, Dolman, the agent, least of all.

The fat and unusually good humored trading agent looked at times as if he had been poleaxed, and was just reeling around looking for a place to drop. There was a haunting, staring look in his bulging eyes that came and went as if, with a sharp and shattering shock to his whole nervous system, he had suddenly realized that he was the victim of unseen powers which by some uncanny and inescapable agency, were intent upon encompassing his doom. Automatically he had gone to the brandy bottle for sustenance and seemed to have the idea that every one else should do likewise. Thus, clutching a bottle of brandy in one hand and a double barreled gun in the other, he moved rather aimlessly about the beach searching out the men who had left their own beaches to come to the defense of his.

Scattered at various points all over the beach, those men—Taylor of Marsden's, Johnson of Barlow's and Frazer of the African Merchants, with several white trader's assistants, including Park and Gordon and as many Kroo-boys as could possibly be spared from all the beaches—constituted all of the additions to Crammond's army of defense; an army consisting of just twenty-three men armed with rifles or revolvers or both, of seventy-odd Kroo-boys armed with machetes, plus a machine gun that Crammond frankly admitted was likely to jam upon the slightest provocation "else it wouldn't have escaped from Sapeli or Benin City or wherever it came from and found its way up here."

Each white man was attended by several Kroo-boys, and the Yoruba soldiers, the machine gun and Crammond held dominion over the mangrove stick breakwater, prepared on an instant's notice to rake its entire length with withering machine gun and rifle fire.

Behind Crammond's Yorubas was a file of Kroo-boys and behind the Kroo-boys was the corrugated iron general warehouse and the high barbed wire fence of the oil yard; the fence on which Kardi the Damned had been "hung up to dry."

The oil yard gates, front and rear, were open, and the white men on watch all over the beach were instructed to retreat to the oil yard whenever the pressure at any point threatened them with isolation.

"Don't try any single handed, Horatio-at-the-bridge tricks," Crammond said principally to the traders' assistants. "Try to get behind barbed wire and a row of casks as fast as you can and pepper them from there. We're here to teach those fellows, if we must, that they can't monkey with the law of the gun—particularly a machine gun." He smiled dryly. "So let's hope the damned thing works, and be sure to use your heads for all your worth in case it doesn't."

Thus, each man in his place, waited and watched, all eyes steadily upon the river, where vague shapes of canoes appeared to multiply in lines that reached deeper and deeper into the blackness of midstream. In each canoe, as it had seemed to young

Gordon earlier in the evening, there was a figure that stood erect, but these figures were now as vague as the canoes themselves, and from the government beach to Marsden's, upon the length and breadth of Okali Creek, there was no light of any kind; no light and scarcely any sound—nothing that was above a breathing whisper.

This in itself was strangely unusual because the Niger Delta native is not given to silence, particularly when he congregates *en masse* upon his *juju* occasions.

IN THE IMMEDIATE rear of Bennett's beach, the thick tangle of the jungle crept up almost to the rear windows of the long, squat Kroo house; and at the upper end of the Kroo house there was the entrance to a path that, less than a quarter of a mile within the bush, suddenly acquired several branches—winding, snake-like pathways that, for the most part, made no promises of any sort and threatened almost anything.

Park was on duty at the upper end of the Kroo house, watching the entrance to the path at the point where it connected with the Bennett beach; and the Kroo-boys who were with him were glad they had been given this particular assignment. Evidently they thought the jungle would be much safer than the water, and that the nearer they were to it, the shorter the distance they would have to run.

So when Dolman, with his brandy bottle, ultimately found Park the senior assistant suggested quietly:

"Don't you think Gordon or one of the younger men should have this post? It's the safest on the beach and I feel as if I'm hogging a good thing."

Dolman reeled around a little, waving both gun and brandy bottle.

"'S all righ', Park. Leave it to me. I know this game. Know it blind. You go down to the kernel store. See? Kernel store. Facing the river. *Savez?* And send Gordon to me. Send him to me. Here. Right here. I'll sit down. I'll sit right down here on this keg of lead shot. It is lead shot, isn't it? Or paint? Hunh. Red paint, I s'pose. Red. Dried up. And red. Like blood. Like dried blood. You know? Kardi? Red. Dried up! God! Oh, God!"

Dolman sat down, shaking terribly, but still hanging on to the rifle and brandy bottle; and Park stood by waiting for this spasm of fear or nerves to pass. It was not like Dolman to act like this. More and more, as the hours had drifted on, he seemed to be in the grip of a kind of hypnotic power—a power that preyed upon his mind, and at short intervals, shook him like a leaf.

A tall figure loomed out of the dark behind them.

"Hello, Park!" Crammond's voice sounded cheerfully enough. "Oh, he's here, is he? I wondered where he'd gone. Better get him into the oil yard and keep him there. That'll be the safest place, particularly after the Harmattan settles down. How does it look to you from here?"

"Quiet as a church," Park answered. "And I think young Gordon or one of the other first-timers should be posted at this back door. It's the safest spot on the beach and—"

"Don't be too sure of that," Crammond interrupted. "And if it is, we need somebody we can rely on to keep the back door wide open in case we need it." Crammond laughed shortly. "That damned Harmattan will be with us in half an hour, and if they don't start anything till the mist comes down, we'll be as hard to see and to find as they will." He glanced at Dolman again, then nodded to Park. "Have a couple of Kroo-boys take him into the oil yard and sit on him." Another short laugh. "Cheerio! See you at breakfast."

"Chin, chin."

"Crammond!" Dolman's voice croaked suddenly; then squeaked. "Crammond! I'm coming with you! You hear? I want to see you fill 'em up with lead! I want to—!"

Several pairs of Kroo-boy hands restrained Dolman in his attempt to follow Crammond, and presently Dolman was seated on a bundle of shooks in the oil yard entirely surrounded by one hundred and eighty gallon casks, with two Krooboys gratefully accepting the duty of acting as his bodyguard.

Down on the waterfront, under the kernel store awning, Gordon could feel rather than see the coming of the Harmattan. There was more than a hint of chill in the air and, out on the water, the bank of canoes appeared to be starting their inshore movement as the creeping fog began rolling down on its nightly journey from the north.

Still the uncanny silence held. If the canoes actually were moving, even the paddle strokes were muffled to a whisper; and from a corner of Dolman's veranda overlooking the river, Taylor of Marsden's peered out and down at a solid black mass that, minute by minute, was being clothed in cold, wispy bands of white.

Those bands of white became broader and broader until they became a lightly waving curtain, and presently this curtain hung between Bennett's beach and that awesome, circling silence that, Taylor was sure was drawing closer and closer to the mangrove stick breakwater and to the very pointed threat of Yoruba guns. Taylor shivered, and not only with the cold.

In all his experience as a trader in the Oil Rivers of the Slave Coast, he had never seen anything like this. For out there, in that pack of canoes, were hundreds—perhaps thousands of blacks—most of whom knew exactly what they might expect from the white men's guns if they persisted in their evident intention to take the Bennett beach by storm and wreak *juju* vengeance upon it and upon Dolman.

Of course, if there were enough of them and the first few rounds of machine gun fire did not stop them or make them hesitate . . .

TAYLOR turned from the veranda rail where he was no longer useful, and hurried down to join Crammond. He buttoned himself into a heavy sweater on the way and found Crammond doing likewise when he reached him.

"If they're coming on at all, you can expect them any minute," he told Crammond. "Looks to me as if they'd concentrate right about here. Better withdraw the younger fellows now and have 'em put some backbone into a mob of Kroo-boys behind that barbed wire."

Crammond nodded.

"Good. You go and bring them in. You know where they are, don't you?"

"Surely. I'll get 'em." And Taylor headed directly toward young Gordon, who was the youngest of the Bennett beach defenders. Rounding the end of the kernel store—the end that faced the river — Taylor whisperingly called Gordon's name.

"Gordon!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take your Kroo-boys back to—What in hell's that?"

Gordon listened, perhaps not longer than a split second.

"Paddles, sir," he answered and did not realize that his voice was scarcely more than a breathing whisper. "Hundreds of them! It's the same sound I heard last night just before— Good God, sir! They—they must be *here!*"

They were.

And save for that last furious swish of paddles, they came like the Harmattan itself, without a sound.

Taylor and Gordon could just dimly see the spectral black mass go hurtling past the outer end of the kernel store, but Crammond saw the hulking menace come over the mangrove stick breakwater, flinging its misty draperies aside, not unlike the prow of a liner with a figurehead coming out of a fog bank.

This figurehead was the grotesquely caparisoned figure of a man who was seated on a kind of throne that was borne on the shoulders of numerous, near naked

blacks. His left arm was stretched straight out before him, and the wide mouthed head of a leopard crowned him, while the forepaws seemed to grasp his throat.

Crammond remembered what young Gordon had said about "a giant as high as the house veranda", just as the black avalanche hit him amidships—which was his center, where the machine gun was posted.

In something less than a minute the only unit of Crammond's defense that was really isolated was Crammond's.

Whether the odds were a hundred or a thousand to one, no one ever knew. The Yoruba guns spat for a little while, the machine gun heaped a sprawling row or two of Binis along the breakwater and the figurehead pitched from his wabbling throne and plunged headlong into the rolling black sea that, though it broke, as the throne bearers did, against the guns, circled around Crammond's flanks with a whispering hiss and poured over him and his Yorubas like a tidal wave.

Then, after a short, pitifully brief space, it passed on.

It passed on into the oil yard and spread all over the beach—a black wraith hurtling through the mist in a dozen directions at once.

Taylor and Gordon and a huddling knot of Kroo-boys found themselves on the outer fringe of it all—impotent, futile, gaping at the voiceless, incredible mass in equally silent amaze. Then Gordon, following Taylor, who had taken a few steps in the general direction of Crammond, suddenly clutched Taylor's arm.

"Wait! Look! Is that—are they—look!"

Huge blacks, with more than usual of the markings and barbaric gee-gaws of African priesthood upon them, loomed up like giant messengers of doom, each holding upon a leash a snarling, four footed beast that strained . . .

"My God! Leopards!" Taylor's voice was just a breath. "Shoot! They're—"

"Gone!" Gordon whispered awesomely.

Taylor fired into the fog and something screamed an answer to the shots, but the spectral cats had vanished with their masters into the mist, and once more Gordon and Taylor hung vaguely suspended in outer space watching the black flood go by.

"Useless," Taylor muttered hopelessly. "And in this damned mist— Let's find Johnson and Frazer if we can and try to reach the gig wharf. If Crammond's machine gun couldn't stop them— Johnson! That you, Johnson?"

A frightened trader's assistant, crawling on his hands and knees, suddenly leaped into being almost at Taylor's feet.

"Taylor! Gordon! Oh, thank God! Johnson—sent me. He's trying to keep—the gig wharf—clear. He says it's our—only chance. There's—*thousands*—of them! And they're setting fire—to the house. All over."

Taylor paused, gripping the assistant's arm, and peered into the mist at the leaping black shadows that, like driven sheep, swung past the outer end of the kernel store in a thick and endless line. Then he shook his head.

"No use," he muttered again more to himself than to Gordon. "We'll be lucky if—"

ABOVE the rush of naked feet that pattered like low thunder upon the hard *chic-coco* beach, there came a sudden and a terrible scream, then another and another—a chilling, awful sound that young Gordon, at least, never forgot.

Park, who had flattered himself that he was "hogging a good thing", not only heard those screams but, like a man staring in a trance at some incredible mystery that was solving itself before his eyes, also saw the why of them.

He had heard the crackling rattle of rifle and machine gun fire—heard it for a very little while and then it had died out like a snuffed candle and in its place had come the swelling patter of countless naked feet that came nearer and nearer—as if straight at him—through the mist.

At that stage he could not see any-

thing; he could only hear the rushing commotion of many bodies, the creaking of casks being rolled aside, the vague suggestion of torches and flames; and then, somewhere in the heart of the oil yard, a gurgling choked off cry that was mingled with the snarling fury of a puma, or leopard, or something of the sort.

Park did not know then how or when Dolman died. He could only guess about this after—well, after the Kroo headman came racing through the rear gate of the oil yard and bolted in a frenzy of fear into the Kroo house.

It was then that Park saw the concealed left hand of Bendi in action. For, just a few seconds later, following the Kroo headman like bloodhounds within an ace of their quarry, the misty shapes of huge spotted cats dragged fearsomely decorated blacks after them and dived into the Kroo house.

Park's Kroo-boys had already vanished into the bush and Park, himself, stood alone at the entrance to the bush path, literally transfixed with horror, waiting for the climax.

No one, if any one saw him there, paid any attention to him. For just a very few seconds misty shapes milled hither and yon before his dully staring eyes; and then, scream upon scream, piercingly terrible and unforgettable, suddenly leaped bodily from the Kroo house.

Park did not then or ever afterward think of the Thing that came from the Kroo house as the Kroo headman. He thought of it as a human voice that sprang through the doorway dragging itself away from the tattered remnant of a body that the snarling cats were pulling down.

The voice passed on, shrieking into the mist the tale of the awful vengeance of Bendi's left hand. But when the stabbing tongues of flame pierced the white cloak of the Harmattan, there was visible to all beholders a Thing that had been a man flung spreadeagle fashion on the high barbed wire fence that stretched across the rear of the oil yard.

Park, with his fingers in his ears, had plunged into the bush. But still no one paid any attention to him. Except for the work that torch and flame had yet to do, the vengeance of the left hand of Bendi was complete.

Down at the gig wharf, however, the completeness of this vengeance was not so well known or understood, particularly by a trifling group of white men and Kroo-boys who were staking their lives on the possession of a paddle or an oar.

Taylor and Gordon and the trader's assistant who had come to fetch them, had managed to join Johnson and Frazer and two assistants at the gig wharf, and here the only semblance of a fight was staged.

There was a swirl of white and black bodies meeting almost head on, the nasty crunch of machetes, the crackle of six-shooters, the ugly thwack of a gun butt on a human skull—a groan, a curse and a growing leaping clutter of bodies crowding the narrow little gig wharf to capacity. And out of this agony crawled five men—three white and two black.

Frazer, Johnson, Gordon and two Kroo-boys.

The Kroo-boys alone were unhurt. Johnson pitched into the bottom of a canoe and lay there motionless as any log. Gordon's left shoulder had been hacked by a machete and he was blind with blood from a gash on his head, but his right hand could still hold a revolver and shoot; and the Kroo-boy who had followed Johnson into this particular canoe did not wait for orders from any one. He grabbed a paddle and thrust the canoe's nose into the friendly mist upstream.

Frazer, dragging a crumpled leg and arm out of the mess, had already preceded them. With the other Kroo-boy, he was heading in a canoe for the African Merchants beach.

Gordon did not know where he was heading, except that it was away from Bennett's beach—as far away as possible before the sun came up.

For Bennett's beach, like the house of Kardi, was damned. It was ablaze from Kroo house to waterfront—warehouse and oil yard and shop, roaring like a furnace as the flames ate their way through the

tinder-dry woodwork as if the place offered no more resistance than a pile of shavings.

Very shortly the beach was deserted—deserted save for the stirring forms that crawled, or tried to crawl away from the terrific heat.

Taylor of Marsden's was among them. With two Bini traders he had done business with for years, he came to himself; and with the aid of these native traders, the agent for Marsden & Company reached a canoe and was carried away from that inferno just as if the madness of the past half hour had never been.

Taylor, in fact, did not know till long afterward just what had happened to him or how he got back to his own beach. The whole weird business was a mystery to the average white man who did not understand the black.

And Crammond was one of those.

"MAS' CRAMMOND! Mas' Crammond! Dey done go! Dey done go 'way! Has you done died?"

Crammond wasn't sure. He was sure Corporal Modo was alive because he heard his voice and vaguely saw the corporal standing upright in the shambles that huddled so terribly about the overturned machine gun. But he was not sure about himself, because he had no voice, no life in his legs or arms—nothing but eyes that lived and saw the Yoruba corporal starkly silhouetted against a wall of yellow flame.

"Mas' Crammond! Mas' Crammond! Your eye look me?"

Modo's tone was worried and fearful. He could see Crammond's eyes upon him and forgot, for the moment, his own several wounds while trying to make up his mind whether Crammond's eyes were alive or as dead as the rest of Crammond seemed to be.

Finally Modo staggered to Crammond's side and, with the one good arm that was left to him, pulled Crammond clear of the silent, unmoving forms about him. This done, Modo leaned against Crammond to hold him up and Crammond leaned against Modo.

Just a few steps from where they stood a grotesque, chalked up figure in a leopard skin stirred slightly and pawed feebly at the unmoving heap of black bodies that crowded in upon him. And the only sound he made was the only sound he could make—a thick, throaty, guttural cry that was scarcely above a whisper.

Modo looked in the direction of this creature and saw the left hand pawing feebly till it pawed no more, while the whispering tongueless cry died out in eternal silence.

And Modo, seeing this, understood only too well that the leopard cult of Bendi's left hand was by no means destroyed because this high priest had died. Another would take his place; many others who had already been prepared, as the spotted beasts had been prepared, from infancy, to make the vengeance of Bendi's left hand a thing to be feared by all men.

For, as Modo well knew, these priests were trained to vengeance. Tongueless and silent as the sign of the left hand of Bendi, they had been reared in hate, just as the leopard cubs had been reared by this mute priesthood to express in real earnest the snarling, tearing vengeance of this branch of the far flung leopard cult; a cult that, in one form or another, was to be found almost anywhere from Sierra Leone to Old Calabar.

But Modo also knew that Bendi had a right hand. And the priests of the right hand of Bendi were not like these; and the temples of Bendi's right hand were quite different from the fearsome temples of silence where strange and awful rituals made all good Binis avoid the paths that were marked by a notched stake.

So Modo, turning his back upon the dead high priest, wheeled Crammond gently around with him and they picked their way gingerly, step by step, and headed away from the waterfront and from any suggestion of the black horde that had come out of the river and the mist and swamped them so completely.

They proceeded drunkenly between two scorching walls of flame, their eyes filled with caked blood and smoke, their bodies dragging painfully, a roaring hell of fire inside Crammond's head. Nothing was very distinct to Crammond, particularly the control of his mind over his legs; and his legs—or Modo's legs—seemed to be leading him on and on, farther and farther away from the waterfront, past something that hung on a rickety fence—something he had seen before somewhere—while all the while there was a crackling, discordant sound in his ears; this and a blaze of light that, somehow or other, filled his eyes and throat with suffocating smoke.

Then and suddenly, Modo and he were in the dark, plunging headfirst into nowhere. The light was gone. The smoke was gone. And everything about him had the misty shape of trees; endless trees everywhere, with scurrying sounds whispering off into the dark.

There were miles of this; trudging miles of it, with Modo at his shoulder and Modo's legs leading them deeper and deeper into the dark, away from the scorching flare of light and away from the nightmare that had come at him across the Bennett beach mangrove stick breakwater.

And then, somehow, in the midst of nowhere—a doorway.

A doorway and a quiet light beyond.

Modo thrust Crammond through this doorway and followed him toward the light; a crude, cruse-like light that vaguely revealed a standing figure on a dais; a figure more crudely ancient than the light.

The face of this figure had no expression at all principally because it had almost no face. But it did have a right hand that was held out, palm down, with a gesture that suggested a benediction.

The left hand, however, was nowhere in evidence, being apparently concealed by the folds of the cloth or cloak the figure wore.

But on the dais on the figure's left, was something that vaguely resembled a panther or a leopard making ready to spring.

Crammond's dimmed eyes saw the crouching effigy of the beast and, being very close to the thing, recoiled against Modo who was stroking the right hand of Bendi and muttering to himself the while.

Modo staggered a step, but steadied and, taking hold of Crammond's right hand, whispered awesomely:

"Be all righ'. Be good. Be good foh black man—be good foh white man. Put him—dere."

And Modo rested Crammond's hand also on the right hand of Bendi.

It was something to lean on and Crammond leaned for perhaps a minute or so staring into the wooden, expressionless face above him in a kind of dull and not too interested fascination.

"Hunh," Crammond's suddenly discovered voice broke the silence with a croaking rattle. "You're—you're a funny looking jigger, whoever you are."

And with that profound observation he slipped slowly into a heap at Bendi's feet.

Out of the shadows behind them a solemn looking old man, in a cheap print cloth, came slowly toward the startled Modo, bearing in his hand a cracked earthenware cup containing *tomba*—the wine of the palm.

The old man muttered to Modo in Bini and Modo answered him in the same tongue, and between them they held Crammond's head up while the *tomba* trickled down his throat.

Then Modo also drank and the old man, as best he could, and with such medicines as he had at his command, cleaned and bathed their wounds and bade them sleep without fear of any man.

For was this not a house of Bendi's—one of the many simple houses of Bendi's right hand—a house of sanctuary and of peace?

It was.

Bendi was a good god.

SOMETHING less than two days later a sternwheeler with many Yoruba lining the rails and a Sobo named Bed making himself as inconspicuous as possible on the after deck, churned her way into Okali Creek looking for war.

And found none.

The creek was deserted except for trading canoes that seemed to hanker to do business as usual; and if the Bennett beach hadn't been a wreck of dust and ashes, no one would have suspected, on the surface at least, that anything out of the way had happened.

All of the white men who had escaped from Bennett's beach were accounted for, Johnson and Gordon having ultimately reached Barlow's beach where Johnson acted as agent; and Park, with two Kroo-boys, had arrived at Crammond's quarters after a night in the bush that even the Kroo-boys were not likely to forget in a hurry.

Crammond was now back on his own beach and was being carefully nursed by a Bini houseboy who was very reticent on the subject of his movements on the night the Bennett beach went up in smoke.

However, since the government forces found no one to fight with, government officials made a vigorous business of investigating the whole amazing "episode," with the result that it finally became known that a canoe boy who had been caught stealing in the Bennett beach shop, had managed to escape from the beach and from the flogging that would have been administered by the Kroo headman, and had succeeded in reaching one of the houses of Bendi before Kardi, his master and owner, caught up with him again.

In spite of the canoe boy's protests, Kardi, in a fit of temper, had flogged the boy for running away and then had brought him back to Dolman as evidence of good faith. And the canoe boy, according to trading beach law where shop thieves were concerned, had also been the recipient of the customary flogging meted out by Kroo headmen everywhere.

And because of this—because of the cry that had come from the lips of a twice flogged, humble and very scrawny canoe boy who was utterly without wives or honor of any sort, the vengeance of the left hand of Bendi had descended upon Kardi and his house, upon Dolman and his house, and upon the Kroo headman, to whom no one had given even a thought.

According to the Bini mind, this was as it should be.

For, if the protection of the right hand of Bendi were to be made sure, the vengeance of Bendi's left hand must, of necessity, be made still surer. Else, what respect would any one have for Bendi—right hand or left?

Therefore, it was quite simple. Even the dullest witted paddle boy could understand it.

Apparently the lantern jawed, steely eyed gentlemen who sat in judgment upon the matter, preferred to be duller witted than paddle boys because they shot or hanged quite a number of the Doli district's most prominent citizens before they sailed away again; Bini gentlemen who died without in the least knowing why they died.

As Bed said to Crammond before the latter went home on sick leave:

"White man no *savez* black man fash'. Black man no *savez* white man fash'. Black man sense palaver be white man fool palaver." And Bed shrugged his shoulders expressively. "Black man catch plenty wife. White man catch one. *E-yaw! Yella! Yella!* I think so white man be fool foh dat!"

For all that Bendi *was* a good god.

CAIN'S REEF

A Novelette of Timeless Pearls and Modern Freebooters

By R. V. GERY

THE weasel faced little man set down his empty glass on a desk edge in the Sydney office, and concluded:

"So I says to 'im: 'Yus,' I says, 'Mister John bloomin' Torrens—you've the morals of a town bull,' I says, 'an' the 'abits of an 'Ottentot. An' what's more,' I says, 'you're a nasty perisher of a big, ginger 'eaded baboon,' I says to 'im, 'an' I don't like yer!' An' with that I walks out on 'im, pretty 'aughty, as you may believe."

Pimm looked at Dockery, and Dockery at Schumacher hunched like a great beetle in the corner. Pimm said—

"How about it, gentlemen?" in the tone of one to whom there was no doubt whatever. Dockery grunted, his slow lazy eyes on the cockney. Schumacher peered for a long time and finally pulled out a dreadful black cigar.

"Haf a schmoke," he said. "Und we will talk. We haf an offer, Misder Hope."

Hope squinted at him out of bright, beady eyes.

"Ho?" he said with some scorn. "Of course you 'ave. Think I'm a bloomin' idjit? 'Course you've an offer—you ain't the sort to 'ave a man in an' stand 'im drinks lavish without somethin' like that bein' in the wind. An' unless I'm much mistook—" he leered at his hosts—"it's somethin' that won't stand much lookin' into, neither. Let's 'ear it, mister."

Pimm, the talker of the syndicate, a dark, sallow personage, leaned back in his chair.

"Not quite so fast, Mr. Hope," he said amusedly. "We've not heard enough yet. And I think—" he turned to Schumacher, the man with the money and most of the brains—"I think we'll have to ask our friend here for a good deal more detail about this—er—Cain's Reef before we begin to talk business with him. In other words, Hope—" he dropped his precise boardroom manner—"let's have some more stuff about the place."

Hope shot a suspicious glance at him.

"No, you don't, mister," he said shortly. "Suck my brains, would yer, eh? I've told yer enough already. An' it strikes me that 'ere's the time for Bert 'Ope to wish you gents a very good day—an' thanks for the Scotch!"

He rose, and made a great show of hunting for his lamentable hat. Dockery growled suddenly—

"Sit down, y'damn little fool!"

Hope swung on him venomously.

" 'Ere!" he rasped. " 'Oo the 'ell are you, talkin' to me that way? You watch yourself, cully!"

He limped over to Dockery and stuck his ugly, triangular face within six inches of the giant's own. Dockery turned his great brown bull's gaze on him once more, glanced down at his own extravagant limbs and at the spade-like hands resting idly on his knee, and chuckled slowly. Hope flushed suddenly scarlet and whipped a hand behind him.

The hook nosed Schumacher interrupted hastily.

"Put der knife away, Misder Hope. He is right. Dis is business—nod monkeyshines."

The cockney subsided, grumbling under his breath. Pimm addressed him once more, with the smile that had won him his way through so many questionable dealings.

"Come now, Mr. Hope," he said. "Let's talk sense. There's money in this for you—quite a handful of money, if you're the sensible fellow I take you for; but we've got to know more than you've told us before we can show you our hand. And first of all, about Cain's Reef itself. You've been there, you say?"

Hope nodded sulkily.

"I 'ave," he said.

"And you could give us a course for it?"

"I might."

"And you'd go back there?"

"Dunno. Might. Depends on whether it was made worth me while."

"We'll come to that. There are pearls, you say?"

"No 'arm in sayin' so, mister. Yes, there are pearls."

"Seen them?"

" 'Course. 'Ow in 'ell'd I know they was there, otherwise?"

"They're something out of the ordinary, eh?"

"They are. I ain't seen bigger. An' now, per'aps, Mister Pimm, you'll oblige me by stoppin' shootin' questions, an' tellin' me right out what it is you're after. Me to take you there, I s'pose. Well, I ain't 'avin' any. It's all off—Bert 'Ope's not goin' to no Cain's Reef. Not with this lot, 'e ain't."

He swept his eye round the room, and laughed contemptuously. Pimm looked at him with curiosity.

"Why?" he asked mildly.

"Because," said Hope. "I ain't goin' to be let in for no blinkin' murder, mister."

DOCKERY sat up straight. "Murder?" he asked interestedly. "Nobody was talkin' about murder. Leastways I didn't hear 'em."

"No," said Hope savagely. "Nobody talked about it, Mister What's-your-name. But I'll tell you who will talk about it—an' do a damn sight more'n talk—an' that's John Torrens, Es-quire. Why, that man'd eat you alive, the lot of you, if you give one sniff after 'is pearls. Talk sense."

"I'm trying to," said Pimm still in his delusively mild way. "Who is this Torrens of yours, anyhow? You had a mix-up with him, you say?"

Hope pulled importantly at his cigar.

"Yus," he said. "I did. An' that's more'n any one else ever did an' got away with it."

"Seem to have a pretty good opinion o' yourself, don't you?" Dockery roused himself once more from his lethargy to put the question.

"Mebbe. I ain't got much o' you—any of you. Torrens'd 'ave the three of you for breakfast, 'e would. An' then look round for more. 'E's an 'oly terror, is John Torrens, an' don't you forget it."

"Frightened of him?" Dockery again.

The cockney scowled.

"No, I ain't," he said viciously. "If I was, Mister Know-it-all—if I 'ad been I shouldn't be sittin' 'ere talkin' to you. I ain't afraid of nobody."

There was a silence, while Pimm smiled resignedly, and Dockery examined the cockney with sudden intentness. Schumacher, who had been sitting with closed eyes, broke into a hoarse chuckle all at once.

"Goot!" he said. "Der very man, chentlemen. He says—und I believe him—dot he is afraid of nopody. Misder Hope," he addressed the cockney, "id is time to cut der cackle. For how much will you show us Cain's Reef?"

Hope looked at him.

"Thousand pound," he said brazenly.

Schumacher pulled out a wad of notes.

"Two hundred," he said. "Fifdy down, und the rest when we gome back."

Hope laughed.

"Back!" he sneered. "You won't come back—not the likes of you. Five hundred—down."

Schumacher riffled the notes casually.

"Three," he said. "Und one down."

"Look 'ere," Hope's tone was that of one trying to reason with a lunatic. "You don't understand, mister. I'm tellin' you, all three of you, that you ain't the stuff to tackle John Torrens. If you do—" he twisted his mouth into a grimace of contempt once more— "it's you three against 'im—an' I ain't takin' any, not at them odds."

Dockery committed himself to a snigger once more, and Hope turned a furious face on him. Trouble seemed to be imminent between the pair, but Pimm cut in smoothly.

"Come here," he said. "We'll talk it over outside a minute, Hope. There are

things you don't know about this business." He turned, over his shoulder, to the others, "I'm going to tell him," he said.

Dockery growled a protest, but Schumacher waved him down.

"*Ja*, tell," he said. "Dere iss no harm."

Pimm led Hope out of the room and the door closed behind them. Dockery turned angrily on Schumacher.

"An' what might be the idea o' that?" he asked. "D'you want to fill that little animal's mouth with our affairs? They ain't exackly Sunday school, you know—an' that over-eddicated ape Pimm'll spill the whole show in ten minutes. Trust 'im."

There was a peculiar congestion about the veins in the big man's face that made even Schumacher hesitate. He broke into a grin of assumed mirth.

"Easy, easy—" he said soothingly. "You are afraid this liddle man blows on us to der police, no?"

"Don't see why 'e shouldn't." Dockery's voice was thick. "You'd better let me 'andle 'im—I'll break 'is silly neck across me knee."

Schumacher laughed outright; when Dockery talked like this the danger was past. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a short black automatic, which he laid on top of the pile of notes, smiling reflectively.

"Dot's why he shouldn't," he said. "In der first place he wants der *geld*—the money—very bad. Und he will take three, four hundred, und glad to get it—und maybe his chance of der pearls. It is goot business for Misder Hope. Und also," he went on softly, "if he did efen imagine der police—" he tapped the pistol—"it would not be the first time, Dockery, eh?"

Dockery seemed to have regained his composure.

"No," he said. "It wouldn't. You're a pretty hand at murder, Jacob. They'll swing you for it one of these days."

"Oh, I subbose." Schumacher laughed again. "But in der meandime dere are dose pearls."

He slipped the automatic back into his pocket again as the door opened and Hope came back with Pimm.

The little man appeared to be a great deal less truculent than when he had left the room. Pimm's tale, whatever it was, seemed to have worked. Hope looked round him, grinned lopsidedly, and said:

"Gents, I'm on. Four 'undred, mister, an' one down for expenses. Seems to me I may 'ave been mistook in you gennlemen."

Schumacher chuckled as he detached a hundred pounds in notes from the bundle and thrust them across to him.

"The rest," he said, "we put in der bank, to be drawn by you, Misder Hope, when we gome back—when we gome back, eh?"

Hope counted the notes and slipped them into his pocket.

"Spoke very 'andsome," he said. "An' now, gennlemen, I reckon you'll be wantin' to 'ear a bit more about this 'ere Cain's Reef—an' about Mister John 'Oly Terror Torrens, eh?"

Pimm pushed the whisky bottle across to him.

"Help yourself," he said. "And then we're listening."

THEY were a deceptive trio, these men in the Sydney office. Schumacher, with his stoop, his spectacles, and his hollow cheeks, gave rather the impression of a small and not very prosperous rag merchant from the ghetto. Dockery, to outward appearance, was an honest and probably none too intelligent country yokel—from some sheep run or other, likely enough. As with Hope, you could place him as an Englishman by his accent, and he was in fact village born back there. His peculiarity lay in his being six feet eight inches in height, and liable to fits of sudden, berserk rage. Otherwise, he was cunning enough, for all his slow staring visage and clumsy burred speech.

Pimm was a different affair. He was the cosmopolitan—smooth, handsome, ready tongued, devious, his suavity cov-

ering a mind that worked in dark and incalculable circles; Schumacher used him as his mouthpiece a great deal, but did not put any implicit trust in him. He was certainly the least courageous of the three.

All of them, at one time or another, had had blood on their hands, and in quantity curiously inverse to their outward appearance. Dockery, despite his hulking shoulders, dangerous smile, and frightful bursts of maniac passion, was the baby in this matter of killing. Pimm had one out and out murder to his credit, but "accessory before the fact" was his natural specialty. He was something of an expert in getting others to do his dirty work.

But Schumacher, ageless, parchment skinned, huddled over his books or plunged fathoms deep in thought, was the genius of the trinity. It was he, for instance, who had engineered the looting of the *Parramatta's* strong room, and the subsequent getaway, when the three of them had marched coolly down the gangplank at Southampton with thirty thousand pounds worth of highly negotiable securities on them, leaving the traceables for an infuriated police to worry over. And it was Schumacher again who had got them into that pretty mess at Iquique, over the jewels of the Doña Felicita Ramirez, when Dockery's great height gave them away, and they had to shoot their way out through the spig police; upon which occasion the bent shouldered gentleman had first of all given the raging Don Enrico Ramirez something for his yellow self—to wit a .45 bullet in the spleen—and then led a midnight rush to the waiting launch with an automatic in either hand. And it was Schumacher yet once more, who, in Saigon— But perhaps enough has been said to indicate the temperament of the man who now sat shrunk into himself in a corner, listening with apparent lack of interest to the cockney's tale of Cain's Reef.

A further note: The three of them had foregathered in Sydney a month before, Pimm and Dockery in urgent response to cables from Schumacher. About Sydney docks you can, if you know how, find out a very great deal about what is going on in the Pacific; and Schumacher, casually poking about the waterside, had uncovered Hope with his tale of a forgotten reef and fabulous pearls. There are scores of such tales, of course, and the pallid thinker had taken this one with an appropriate amount of salt at first; but then he began to suspect that there might possibly be something more to the straddling, self-sufficient cockney than met the eye, and some of the details of his consequential story had prompted him to summon the remaining members of the team of three, and to set about the preliminaries of assault.

Hence Hope's presence in the newly hired office, the whisky on the table, the villainous black cigar, and what follows.

"Yus, I'll take yer there. Got a set o' charts, I see. Let's 'ave 'em. Ain't none o' you gents is a navigator? No, I reckoned not. Nor me, neither; but I knows the channel in, if you'll set me down outside. You'll 'ave to get a schooner, an' a good skipper, what won't talk. Got that fixed, eh?"

He pawed over the charts and picked one out.

" 'Ere you are," he said casually. "It's on that. Tain't marked, o' course. Name's Torrens' own invention, seemin'ly —Cain's Reef, I mean. Queer way o' christenin' a lump o' coral. Somethin' out o' the Bible, ain't it?"

Pimm and Dockery bent over the chart flattened under Hope's dirty paw on the table.

"Which is it?" asked Dockery, scanning the multitudinous specks and tiny atoll rings that dotted the white surface.

Hope straightened up and regarded him belligerently once more.

"Look 'ere, Mister Hop-pole," he said, "you keep that tongue to your little self an' don't be so damn' inquisitive. None o' that with Bert 'Ope, thank yer! I'm runnin' this show, an' don't you fergit it; an' I'll give you the course—when the time comes an' not before. You get a good schooner, an' a good skipper, an'

arms—don't fergit the arms, if it's John Torrens an' 'is pearls you're layin' for—an' I'll do the rest. But that's all I'm tellin' yer just now—about gettin' there, that is."

Schumacher chuckled from his corner.

"You see, Dockery," he said. "Dere are no flies on dis liddle fellow. Better be careful of him."

The giant turned an infuriated glare on his leader, but Schumacher took no manner of notice.

"Ask him now aboudt Torrens," he said calmly. "Dot is der crux of der situation."

HOPE poured himself another drink.

"Torrens?" he said. "Ah, 'e's a scorcher, John Torrens is. 'E's a big ginger 'aired chap—pretty nigh as big as the hinfant prodigy 'ere—with a red beard like a doormat. Where 'e comes from, I dunno, 'cept that 'e talks like a toff when 'e's in 'is tantrums, which show's 'e's a real one. I'd say 'e'd been a slap-up gennleman sometime or other; but now, what with livin' on Cain's Reef an' actin' like a tin god on wheels with the Kanakas, an' 'avin' to fight for 'is pearls—oh, yes, 'e's 'ad to do plenty o' that—'e ain't what you might call a pleasant feller to get along with."

"Were you with him long?" asked Pimm.

"Better part o' six months—'elpin' 'im drive 'is divers. Ended up, as I was sayin', with an 'ell of a row with 'im. Over a woman it was, o' course—although 'e ain't got any weaknesses that way—an' I stood up to 'im an' give 'im as good's 'e give me, an' maybe a bit better; an' that's what nobody's 'ad the guts to do before, seemin'ly, because 'e let me get away with it. There's plenty o' fellers worked for 'im like I did, one time an' another—an' they've all gone the same way 'ome."

"Wodjer mean?" asked Dockery.

"Oh, nothin' you could lay your 'ands on, o' course; the sharks got 'em, takin' a coolin' dip in the lagoon, pore chaps. 'Ow silly men are sometimes, ain't they? Or mebbe they'd go down in a divin' suit, one lovely arternoon, an'—dear me, wot a bloomin' pity?—must 'ave been a bit o' coral cut that airline! Ho, yus, I don't think!"

He curled his lip back from his yellow teeth in an unlovely grin, and took another cigar from the intent Schumacher.

"There's five men," he went on, "that's been put away like that. Five, that I knows of. Maybe a dozen, if everything come out. An' that's not countin' the times 'e's 'ad to fight off bunches o' fellers like you."

"It's been tried before, then?" This from Pimm.

" 'Course. There was Redman—and 'e stayed there for keeps. An' Bird an' 'is crowd. I dunno what 'appened to Bird, but Torrens says 'e 'ung three of 'is men. That's another little 'abit of 'is, by the way — 'angin' people. 'E says it's cheaper!"

Schumacher began to laugh once more, a guttural cackle.

"Dot's enough, Hope," he said. "Or you make our flesh greep. In four days' time—suits you, eh?—we sail from here. But schooners and captains—no, we do nod work dot way. You gome back here tomorrow, und we haf more to tell you. Dot is all right by you, yes?"

"O.K. mister—" The cockney got to his feet and went to the door. "An' I'll now," he said with mock ceremony, "wish you a very good day, gennlemen. By-by, sweet'eart!" And with this final shot at Dockery, he was gone.

Pimm looked after him a trifle dubiously.

"I suppose it is all right," he said. "Think he'll come back?"

Schumacher betrayed as near annoyance as he ever did.

"Pimm," he said, "you haf a head. Use it. Und for you, Dockery, no quarrels with dot man undil we haf finished with him. Afderwards—" he shrugged his shoulders. Dockery nodded sulkily and fell once more to examining his nails.

"Und now," Schumacher cocked his head on one side, "dere iss der question of

our transportation, eh? Der dependable schooner und der skipper und der arms—aha, was it nod? *Himmel*, I must laugh!"

"Well, what about 'em?" asked Dockery viciously. "Know anything of the sort—you seem to know such a devil of a lot?"

Schumacher nodded, a mischievous smile lighting up his pale face.

"*Ja*," he said. "I know der man—und he is almost as big a fool as you, Dockery. Und we trafel to dis Cain's Reef, nod in der dirty cabin of a trading schooner, but as guests, chentlemen, of a young friend of mine, aha! Dot is more suitable, eh, for the herr doktor brofessor, und his so eminent friends—no? Sid down now, und listen."

Pimm and Dockery pulled up their chairs. It was two hours later when they rose. Pimm felt constrained to remark admiringly—

"Jacob, you're a wonder!"

II

MR. THOMAS ECCLESTON CARRUTHERS was a crank. Not the crusty, dry-as-dust type of crank, but a lean, fresh faced young fellow, to whom fortune had allocated—so said the jealously disposed—a much greater store of this world's goods than was altogether good for him. His recreation consisted in knocking about the world in his pleasantly appointed steam yacht, *Mariposa*, and his crankdom in the study of pearls.

He had, he was inclined to boast, visited in person every pearling center of note in the seven seas, and was—in the manner of cranks wherever found—meditating a treatise on the subject that should surpass in dryness and avoirdupois anything so far perpetrated in that line.

He had come down from Japan, where he had been delving into the mysteries of the synthetic industry, and—by a fortuitous bit of good luck for the syndicate of three—a newspaper reporter had got hold of him within a couple of days of his arrival in Sydney. The resulting half column of interview had come to the eye of the industrious Schumacher, and had led to a series of maneuvers in that able strategist's best manner.

The campaign opened by the delivery on board the *Mariposa* of a letter, written on what purported to be the letterhead of the department of zoology of a great German university—it had cost Schumacher some spirited contriving to have this faked—expressing the most whole souled and polysyllabic admiration of the Herr Carruthers and his work among the oysters. The letter proceeded to introduce its writer, the Herr Doktor Jakob Schumacher, obviously from his magisterial tone a great expert in pearls, and to ask the high honor of meeting the so learned Herr Carruthers at that gentleman's early convenience. It added that the Herr Doktor would be found at a designated hotel ashore; and in ten minutes Carruthers was crossing Sydney Harbor at the greatest speed of one of the *Mariposa's* boats.

He discovered his man alone in the lounge of the hotel, and forthwith insisted on his accompanying him back to the yacht. There he sat him down and, almost pop-eyed with excitement, commenced a discussion which delighted his crank's heart.

The Herr Doktor, he discovered, was excellently documented in his subject. A neat and quite thorough disquisition on the Japanese experiments—not for nothing had Schumacher read and re-read that first interview in the paper—was followed by gentle modulations to the matter of large sized specimens, little known fisheries, exploration, romance—oh, it was all beautifully arranged. Schumacher had, as he confessed to himself, done an excellent job of work, and Carruthers leaned forward in his chair, his clear skinned face alight with the contagious excitement of the rabid enthusiast.

So Tom Carruthers, that honest and ingenuous young plutocrat, sat in with the Herr Doktor Schumacher of Teufelsdrockh University, and thought what an entertaining person he was. And the

celebrated Herr Doktor beamed glassily through his spectacles at his so learned young friend, and very gradually inched the conversation round to Cain's Reef. It says much for Jacob and his perspicuity that all this was two good weeks before the interview already recorded with Hope; and the Fates up above must have indulged in a quiet chuckle over the whole proceeding.

Carruthers fell for Cain's Reef with a crash. The name alone was, to him, worth the price of admission. By his second interview with the German he was hinting at a voyage of discovery, and by the end of the third—which took place the day before the syndicate's deal with Hope—the matter was all cut and dried. If the Herr Doktor would so far honor a mere amateur, they would take a look at this Cain's Reef and its indecently sized pearls.

Alas. The Herr Doktor shrugged eloquent shoulders, blinked eloquent short sighted eyes behind the glasses. He was traveling with a friend. A moneyed gentleman, he gave Carruthers to understand, but no expert, this Mr. Pimm. Cultured, however—a man of the world, even as Herr Carruthers himself. But no, no! Schumacher's expression was a masterpiece as the invitation for the cultured friend fell pat from Carruthers' lips. A thousand times no; so great an imposition was not to be thought of. But ach, what kindness, what courtesy of the so friendly Carruthers . . .

And thus it went on, for half an hour by the clock, until Carruthers stood pledged to entertain not only Herr Schumacher, but the moneyed friend, Pimm; Dockery, the moneyed friend's man—it was the only way they could work him into the scheme and his language was astonishing—and also the cockney, Hope, whose duty it was to indicate the course in through the shoals. Not one word, observe, of John Torrens. The trio kept that very carefully under their thumb, as an ancillary problem to be handled later.

Whereupon the three repaired to their office high up over the crowded city, and looked at one another, and laughed until they wept. Hope came in, as arranged, and they stopped laughing long enough to direct him to the *Mariposa* and tell him to get aboard in the morning; and the next day at noon Schumacher, Pimm and Carruthers sat under the awning on the yacht's afterdeck, watching the sea creaming at the foot of Sydney Heads, and the *Mariposa's* nose dipping into the first long roll of the Pacific.

By special arrangement, Dockery—who made a very superior man-servant for all his startling height—lived in state with the yacht's engineers; and Hope, who had confined his comments on the splendor of his surroundings to a heartfelt "Gawd!" proceeded to make himself entirely at home with the trimmers and stokers, from whose free and easy company no remonstrance or invitation would lure him. The *Mariposa* was a happy little ship, and the cheerful Carruthers saw to it that she continued so; and Hope stayed where he was.

He did more, unfortunately. From the second day out he made the explosive Dockery's life a hell for him, by ribald jeers before the crew, and by the invention and circulation among his grinning hosts of opprobrious nicknames directed at the big man. So that Dockery, in the privacy of Pimm's cabin—the general headquarters on board of the syndicate—was moved to fury.

"I'll murder that little *barnshoot* before this trip's out," he said one afternoon. "See if I don't. I ain't goin' to stand that stuff from nobody."

Schumacher looked at him a trifle anxiously. He had seen Dockery in one of his blind rages before.

"Wait awhile, my friend," he advised. "Id isn't long before we are finished with dis Hope. He iss a nuisance, I know; but once he blays his part, Dockery, he iss yours to deal with, rememper. Und don't forget the pearls."

"Well, I ain't goin' to stand a lot more, I'll tell you," said Dockery, "pearls or no pearls. There's some things no man'll put up with."

Schumacher patted him on the shoulder.

"A few days more only," he soothed. "Und then—" He grimaced suggestively, and Dockery grinned an understanding grin.

"Got it all fixed?" he asked. Schumacher nodded.

"I do not ofden fail," he said with pardonable pride. "Led us only get ashore on dis Cain's Reef . . ."

Dockery went away sulkily. Schumacher turned to Pimm.

"Dere comes trouble with dot fellow, I think," he said. "We haf seen his temper before. Und Hope rides him too far."

"He's a foul tongued little blackguard, Hope," said Pimm. "But I don't see what we've got to be frightened about. Dockery will last a few days yet, and then, when the time comes, he'll smash him like a fly. He's much too keen on the pearls, is friend Dockery, to do anything silly."

"*Ja*, maybe," Schumacher said doubtfully. "But he will—how do you say?—upset der apple cart if he quarrel with der little man too soon."

Pimm nodded.

"Yes," he said. "But don't ask me to separate 'em, Jacob. That's your job."

Schumacher made as if to tear his hair.

"Ten thousand devils," he swore in German. "Must I always nurse you all like children?"

III

A TABLE was set on a wide veranda, shaded by tall trees. It was a highly civilized table, with a clean white cloth of fine linen, silver furnishings glittering in the morning light, and a bowl of flowers set in the middle of it. A stout Chinese was putting the finishing touches to the preparations for a meal, with one ear cocked over his shoulder as if listening for something.

By and by, from some small distance, there came the clear tinkle of a ship's bell. Eight times it struck, its notes sounding in the *ting-ting—ting-ting* immemorial among bells at sea; and at its last note the Chinese fell back and took post behind a great chair set at the head of the table.

For a moment there was no sound except the thresh of the trade wind in the palms and *pandanus* about the veranda. Then a door opened swiftly, and a man came out, walking with the heavy, decided stride of one to whom authority has become second nature. He nodded abruptly to the Chinese, and sat down.

He was a striking figure, with bull shoulders and the long, prehensile arms of a gorilla. His age, which was sixty or more, had left few marks on him, save for a fleck of gray at his temples and in the heavy red eyebrows that overshadowed his hot, intolerant blue eyes; the great beard that covered his chest like a shield was still a brilliant burnished copper in hue.

He was dressed in crackling white drill, with a certain smartness about it that hinted at a service background for its wearer; and indeed his whole figure was that of a man who still retained a justifiable pride in his appearance, and did not much care who knew it. This was John Torrens, the redoubtable master of Cain's Reef.

He ate his breakfast in complete silence, waited upon by the Chinese. Then, lighting a black pipe, he strode across to a little office that opened off the bungalow's main living room, and carefully shut the door after him.

There was an ancient and battered desk in one corner of the tiny cubby hole, and in the other, just under the window, stood a two-foot green safe. Torrens went to the latter, twirled a dial, and extracted from it three steel cases, the size and shape of a quarto volume. He set them side by side on the desk and opened them one by one.

There were twenty or thirty pearls in each tray, great iridescent globes of light, ranging from the size of a pea to that of a small pigeon's egg. A couple of magnificent blacks reposed side by side, and there were a dozen or more rose tinted; one enormous round specimen, nearly an inch across, glowed milkily from a separate compartment. Torrens looked down

at them, chewing the stem of his pipe.

There were nearly twenty years' pickings before him, the spoil of the richest bed in the Pacific—worked for, won, and finally fought for against a dozen would-be looters. From the time when Commander Torrens had left his ship on the China station, and thereafter sent in his papers as an officer of His Britannic Majesty's navy (and there were odd tales told of that occurrence) he had been a recluse from white men's eyes on this scrap of coral set down in the middle of its circumambient reefs and shallows, amassing a great fortune, and holding it against all comers. Hence his navy discipline, and hence as well a certain reputation, among the few who knew anything about him, as a tough case—the toughest in those seas.

And now he was near the end of his exile. Six months more, he thought, as he fingered the wealth before him, would see the time for John Torrens to cry "Enough!" and leave Cain's Reef to whoever cared to take it—Cain's Reef and its anxieties and discomforts, and its all too frequent occasions when sheer, ruthless determination had been his only safeguard. He was a lonely man, was John Torrens, but the loneliness was of his own making, and he smiled a trifle grimly at the thought of his return to civilization, so-called.

Wing Lee, the Chinese, knocked at the door, and Torrens put the pearl cases back into the safe, twisted the combination again, and went outside. The fat yellow man beamed a little nervously at his master and indicated the clock; as he did so the ship's bell sounded once again—six bells, this time. Torrens grunted, and took from Wing Lee a naval cap with a smart white top. He started for the door, but the Chinese stopped him.

"You lock safe?" he asked solicitously.

Torrens glared at him.

"How many more times are you going to ask me that, you old heathen?" he inquired with a touch of humor. "Must be every other day you've got that bee in your bonnet. Wing, you're getting old."

The Chinese grinned as Torrens went on. "One of these days I'll give you a belting, my slit eyed friend, if you ask silly questions. What's the idea—afraid some one'll walk off with the pearls? Is that it?"

"Plenty bad men come here," said the Chinese sententiously.

"Shut up, Wing, you old croaker," Torrens chuckled. "You get on with your work, my lad, and stop worrying about the pearls."

He strode off down the path, and Wing Lee looked after him, shaking his head as if still in doubt.

ON THE EDGE of the beach, facing the flashing waters of the lagoon, a row of neat huts had been built—sheds and godowns, and a building that, from its trim windows and well scoured coral steps, was an office. In front of the latter a flag flew from a tall pole.

Drawn up on the brilliant sand were three or four well kept whaleboats, with the maze of lines and piping and the heavy air pumps that denote the scientific diving outfit. A tiny coral jetty had been built out into the lagoon, and a white steam launch lay alongside it, a Kanaka engineer tinkering with her copper boiler.

In front of the office, immediately under the flagstaff, fifty or sixty brown people were waiting; half a dozen divers, in the clumsy suits and dull metal fittings of their calling, and carrying under their arms the globular diving helmets; a couple of rows of men behind them, fishermen, shell hands, laborers; behind them again, squatted on the sand, were the *vahines*—the Kanaka women and girls, and a dozen fat children. There was a subdued hum of chatter.

A Eurasian clerk in spectacles came out of the office, pen behind his ear, and struck sharply on the ship's bell that hung just at the door. At once the chatter died down, the divers juggled their helmets under their arms, the women scrambled to their feet. Discipline took hold of the dependents of John Torrens.

That individual walked smartly down

the path, leaving Wing Lee hovering anxiously over the breakfast table. With a nod to the clerk he took up his position on the steps of the office, accepted a small book handed to him by the official, and proceeded to read prayers—the daily prayers of the navy—in a loud, unemotional voice. This done, he returned the book, and began to pass down the lines, shooting keen and vigorous glances at each man, and now and then jerking a word over his shoulder to the clerk, who followed him with a ledger. Morning inspection in Cain's Reef was only another of John Torrens' links with his service past.

The inspection over, the clerk took a key from Torrens and went across to one of the sheds, followed by a dozen stalwart Kanakas. To each of them he issued a shining Winchester, and they fell in again on each side of the office door, where Torrens stood motionless. There was a little silence.

Then a man was brought out of a kind of pen, built of strongly mortised logs, and with a grated door. He was, like the rest, a Kanaka—a tall, handsome fellow, his features disfigured by a scowl that probably indicated more of sulkiness than of apprehension. Torrens looked him over and turned to the Eurasian.

"Read the charge," he said. The *babu* once more referred to his book.

"Theft of a pearl, sar," he announced importantly.

"Evidence," said Torrens, and stepped forward himself. "Yesterday at diving I found this man, Fao-le, with a pearl concealed in his mouth."

He resumed his place.

"Anything to say?" he asked the man.

No answer. A little ripple of apprehension seemed to pass over the gathering. Torrens threw a glance at a coil of rope laid out at the foot of a tree.

"Forty lashes," he said suddenly, as if altering his mind.

They were laid on by a brawny native, until the blood ran over the brown, satiny flesh, but the victim made no sound. At the conclusion of the performance Torrens turned to the clerk.

"Next time," he said, "I hang for this offense. Translate."

"Yessar," said the Eurasian, and gabbled in Polynesian to the listening crowd. Then John Torrens carried on with the work of the day.

"Boats away!" he called, and walked down the beach to his launch.

In five minutes she was puffing across the quiet surface of the lagoon, with her three whaleboats in tow, and Torrens sitting erect in her stern, a gleaming figure of authority, his great copper beard bright against the blue sea.

IV

IT WAS a good ten days' run, even for the *Mariposa's* stout engines, to the border of that section of the chart on which lay Cain's Reef. North and by east she ran, day after day of bluer seas and more brilliant skies; until at last, on the noon of the eleventh, her master dropped his pencil and protractor on the chartroom table, and said to Carruthers—

"We're just there or thereabouts, sir."

The owner looked up from a game of chess with which he and Schumacher were beguiling their leisure.

"Very well, Skipper," he said. "Better make it so. And now, I suppose, Herr Schumacher, we'd better have your little friend up and see if he'll be a bit more communicative for a change."

Schumacher laughed.

"*Ja*," he said. "Haf him up."

Hope bustled into the chartroom, more than ordinarily full of importance.

"Want me?" he inquired. "We're there, eh?"

"We shall be, this evening," Carruthers told him. "Now then, which of these places is it?"

"Let's 'ave a *dekko* at that chart again." Hope thrust himself boldly forward and sprawled across the table, pencil in hand. "Yus, 'ere it is," he said, and put a ring around a large atoll, unnamed as he had before observed, and surrounded by a maze of reefs and bars of coral. "That's

Cain's Reef." He looked up impudently at Carruthers. "An' 'ow far off might we be, Capting?"

"Five or six hours' steam," said Carruthers with a smile. "Looks as if we can take her within four miles or so."

"Yus," rejoined Hope sweetly. "But for them four mile you've to depend on me, mister—an' don't you fergit it."

"Of course, of course." Schumacher found it a convenient time to interrupt, for the cockney's tone toward the *Mariposa's* owner was not conciliatory. "Und it might be goot, Herr Carruthers—*nicht wahr*—if he took der boat in firsdt, with our gombliments and indroductions to der owner, eh?"

"Wot's that?" said the cockney suddenly. "Me runnin' errands—alone—to that ginger 'aired tomcat in there? Try again, mister; try again!"

"Why, what's the objection?" asked Carruthers, surprised.

"I've 'ad some of John Torrens before—that's why," said Hope. "An' I ain't goin'."

Pimm strolled in, hands in pockets, before Carruthers could pursue the matter.

"What's the trouble?" he asked pleasantly.

"Our little friend seems reluctant to pay visits ashore without an escort," said Carruthers. "Who is this Torrens, anyhow, Hope?"

"Ah, 'oo? You'll learn soon enough, ducky. Arsk these 'ere gents. But I ain't doin' no mine droppin' under 'is bows—not any for Bert 'Ope, I thank yer!"

He swaggered out of the chartroom, and Carruthers turned to Schumacher.

"He's a queer little fish," he said amusedly. "But what's all the trouble about this John Torrens? Either of you gentlemen know?"

Pimm hesitated for a fractional second, but Schumacher was equal to the occasion.

"No," he said imperturbably. "I know nodings of him. How should I?"

"Well, we'll be there or thereabouts, as the skipper says, tonight. We might land in the morning, I think, gentlemen."

"*Ja*," said Schumacher. "Und in der meandime led us go below, Herr Pimm. I haf some abbaratus to be prepared—und you, I am sure, will haf instructions for der excellent Dockery, eh?"

THE MASTER, a bluff little seaman, faced Carruthers.

"I'd like a word with you, sir," he said stiffly.

"Say on, Skipper," said Carruthers.

The master scratched his head.

"There's two or three little things, sir," he said. "And first—though I suppose it ain't none of my business—I don't like this sealed order, 'ole-and-corner business."

"What's that?"

"Why, sir, this keeping the exact bearin' of this here reef secret until the last. Why? What's the game, sir?"

"That's easy enough, skipper. This is Hope's own job, and he's naturally anxious not to have it known all over the ship."

The skipper snorted.

"Then there's plenty o' things 'e ain't so careful about, sir, if I may say so. There's this Mister John Torrens—'ooever 'e may be."

"What about him?"

"Only that 'Ope's been tellin' some mighty queer tales among the stokers, sir. Judgin' by what 'e says, this Torrens ain't a pleasant customer. An' there was somethin' else, sir."

"Well? Out with it, skipper."

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, in advance—the gentlemen are your guests, sir—but, from what 'Ope lets on, they ain't quite so ignorant of Torrens as they make out to be. 'E says 'e told 'em all about 'im before ever 'e come aboard."

"What?"

"Accordin' to what I'm told, sir. And—" he coughed—"seein' as 'ow Mr. Shoemaker said just now—"

Carruthers fingered his chin.

"Queer," he said. "Anything else, Mason?"

The skipper's gravity increased.

"Yes," he said. "There was, sir. I 'adn't intended to speak about it, if this other business 'adn't turned up; but now I believe we ought to 'ave it out. I'd like to get the engineer up, sir, if you please."

He turned to the voice tube at Carruthers' nod, and the chief, a dark faced Scot, came up the ladder.

"Guid mornin', sir," he said with ceremony.

"Mr. Macdonald," said Mason, "I'll get you to repeat what you told me yesterday—remember?"

Macdonald nodded.

"I was sayin' to the skipper, sir," he announced, "that there's too mony wee pistols an' the like aboard this vessel."

"Pistols?" asked Carruthers sharply.

"Aye," said the engineer. "Yon London man's carryin' one—the little fella, I mean. Simmons that's greasin' for me, saw it. An' the big laddie, forby, that's valet to Mr. Pimm. He's armed, too. Macklin, the third, saw him cleanin' it in his bunk. An' I'm no' sayin'—judgin' from the talk—but that Mr. Pimm himself—"

Carruthers stopped him.

"Steady, steady, Chief," he said. "What's all this pack of nonsense?"

The engineer looked uncomfortable.

"I ken—I ken, sir," he said. "They're your guests, an' it's no' my place to creeticise. But I thocht it ma duty to mention it to the skipper."

"Quite right, too, Macdonald," said Carruthers. "I'll look into it. But in the meantime I'd say nothing more about it."

The engineer saluted and went out, and Carruthers turned to Mason once more.

"Well, skipper?" he asked.

"Well, sir," said Mason non-committally.

"Of course, there's nothing in it," Carruthers said. "These fellows aren't that kind, Mason. I'll look into it, of course; but I don't believe—"

He was interrupted abruptly by a tremendous hubbub immediately below them—shouts, curses, the thunder of feet on planking, and finally the startling crack of a pistol. Carruthers and Mason stared at one another for a second; then the owner made a dive for the door, with the skipper at his heels.

Below on the foredeck a dramatic little scene was being enacted. Hope was running for very life round and round the deck, twisting and dodging, with the gigantic Dockery, automatic in hand and bellowing with insane fury, close on his track. As the two watched, Dockery fired once and again, blindly and without aim, so that the bullets knocked chips from the woodwork of the forecastle.

Whatever stage of crankdom had taken possession of Tom Carruthers, he could act rapidly enough at a pinch. Setting a hand on the rail of the navigating bridge, he heaved himself bodily across it with a spring, and dropped a full ten feet to the deck, straight in front of the infuriated Dockery. He wasted no words on him, but ran in under the pistol and took him about the thighs with a grip that told of acquaintance with the amenities of the wrestling ring. A quick jerk over his shoulder, and the huge fellow flew through the air, to land against a stanchion with a thump that knocked him dizzy. The automatic flew from his hand, and Carruthers set his foot on it.

"What the devil's all this?" he said to the panting Hope.

"Swelp me, gov'nor, I ain't done nothin'." Hope's whine was very convincing. "I was just talkin' to 'im—funnin' around, like—an' 'e come at me with 'is mouth open."

Dockery had staggered to his feet, and stood glaring at the cockney with congested eyeballs.

"Yes," he said savagely. "An' I'll have the pluckin' of you by the time all's done, me little beauty—so you c'n order your coffin as soon's you like. Nobody ever crossed Henry Dockery without sufferin' for it."

Pimm had come out, with Schumacher close behind him. He saw his cue for assuming charge of the situation once more.

"You, Dockery," he said with asperity, "cool off there. And what the deuce

d'you mean by carrying firearms, eh?" He turned to Carruthers, smiling. "This is unpardonable on your ship, sir," he said charmingly. "And I don't know how to apologize. He's a good enough fellow, but a bit apt—you know." He touched his head with his forefinger. "Get below, now," he said to Dockery, "and lie down for awhile. It'll pass off. And as for you, Hope," he went on, "you leave him alone. He's no concern of yours, and you're a deal too free with your tongue, anyhow."

Hope stared at him derisively, and put his fingers to his nose.

"Understand that, cully?" he jeered. "You watch yourselves, the 'ole lot of yer. John Torrens'll 'ave a word for you, soon enough."

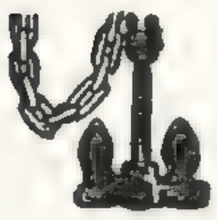
He flirted his thumb over his shoulder with indescribable insolence, and strolled airily away.

Schumacher spoke in his guttural bass.

"An unfordunade affair, Herr Carruthers," he said. "But id is now seddled, no? Und id will nod spoil our trip, I hope."

Carruthers looked at him speculatively. He was doing some hard thinking.

"Why, no," he said. "It's just beginning to get interesting."



THE *MARIPOSA* lay at anchor, close in to the coral bar that hemmed in Cain's Reef. Her master, with an eye on a heavy cloud bank coming up from the windward, had edged her as far as was safe toward the spouting surf, and with a couple of anchors down was watching his weather with some anxiety. It was four bells in the morning watch—two o'clock—and he paced the little navigating bridge with his coat collar turned up, and a rubber coat to hand. The rain was starting already, and it was pitch dark.

Almost immediately below his feet, unusual occurrences were taking place in the darkened *Mariposa*. In Pimm's cabin, where they had been waiting for an hour or more without a word said between them, its occupant and Schumacher sat in the blackness, listening. They were listening, as a matter of fact, for Dockery, the third of the trio, who was about his own business—and theirs.

Both men wore dark clothing and rubber shoes. Since their ostentatious retirement to rest at ten o'clock they had put a great deal of subdued conversation behind them; and they were about agreed that the time for action was at hand.

"It will haf to be tonight," Schumacher had said, with a baleful glance at Dockery folding Pimm's clothes as an excuse for his presence in the cabin. "Thanks to you, great blockhead—*Herr Gott*, for what must you eggsplode so?"

Dockery looked aggrieved.

"He called me a slob sided cross between a telegraph pole and a she-jackass," he grunted.

"Well," said Schumacher out of the corner of his thin mouth, "aren't you?"

The giant collapsed, grumbling to himself. He knew better than to cross Schumacher in this mood. The German turned to Pimm.

"Well?" he said again. "Tonight, then. You are ready, eh?"

Pimm nodded, and Schumacher bent over to him.

"Listen again, the two of you," he said, and began to talk in a whisper.

Now, they were waiting for Dockery, to whom had been delegated a task he viewed with extreme delight. The ship was silent, except for the slap of the waves against her skin, and the very occasional clatter of a shovel from the stokehold, where the engineer's little black gang kept steam. A sound of snoring came from the officers' quarters, where the First and Second slept the sleep of easy conscience; and the two, sitting in the dark, could hear the master's footsteps, as he swung back and forward on the bridge above them.

Finally, just as Pimm was about to lean across and whisper into Schumacher's ear, there was a faint sound in the alleyway outside, the cabin door opened and closed swiftly, and Dockery slipped in. For a man of his size he moved with indecent stealth.

"Got him?" he breathed.

"'Ere 'e is, the swine," Dockery's rumbled answer had more than a hint of satisfaction in it.

There was a faint click, and a pencil of light from a tiny electric torch illuminated the gloom. It fell full on the lineaments of Hope, the cockney, bound and most effectively gagged, and lying like an infant in Dockery's mighty arms. His weasel's eyes were venomous with hate, and he was doing his best to express his sentiments by the contortions of his purple countenance.

Schumacher gave a small grunt of congratulation, and Dockery allowed himself a subdued chuckle.

"He'll not be quite so free with his damned tongue after this," he said. "I'll cut it out, and make 'im eat it—when we've done with 'im!"

"Ssh!" Schumacher gripped his shoulder. "Quiet, you! Und look afder dis fellow. Pimm, come with me."

He opened the cabin door with extreme caution and eased himself through it. Pimm followed him, nervously fumbling in his pocket.

CAPTAIN MASON on the bridge paused in his stride, and cocked an ear to listen. He was unaccountably nervous tonight, somehow or other; the sense of impending calamity hung over him like a pall, or the mountainous clouds that were advancing from windward with such slow and menacing implacability.

He had the indefinable sense that there was something wrong, as he went to the rail and looked over it. His hearing, attuned to every regular sound of shipboard, had caught and registered a strange sound; a shuffle or a creak, maybe, that was not in its right place, and could not be placated at once. He made the mental note, as he went back to his pacing, that he would take a turn round the ship when he came off watch—things were certainly not altogether as they should be.

Immediately under his feet, crouched beneath the overhang of the bridge, Schumacher and Pimm held their breath. They heard the steady footsteps overhead stump back and forward, thwartships across the beam of the *Mariposa;* and when Mason had got to the far side from them Schumacher made his rush.

With a quickness that no casual observer would ever have credited to him he took the ladder in his stride and leaped suddenly out on to the bridge planking, just as Mason, startled at the thud of rubber soled shoes, swung round to face him. In the darkness—the chartroom was unlighted and the only glint came from the open engineroom skylight—there was a quick scuffle, a muffled curse of surprise from Mason, and a heavy thump. The skipper dropped like a log; Schumacher knew his way when it came to the use of the flat of an automatic on the temple.

Without a sound he dragged Mason into a deeper patch of shadow under the chartroom wall, and then slipped like a wraith down the ladder once more. At its foot Pimm met him.

"Below again!" whispered Schumacher. "Der is one more yet."

Carruthers slept uneasily in his cabin. Dreams—unpleasantly dramatic dreams—succeeded one another from his subconsciousness, causing him to twist on the pillow and mutter incoherent words of protest at the figures that danced and flickered before him. Two or three times already he had awakened and lain listening to the little movements in the *Mariposa's* hull about him; he had even fancied once he heard talking in low tones in one of the adjacent cabins, and had wondered more or less idly who it might be at that hour. It died away, if he had heard it at all, and he turned and went back to his troubled slumbers.

Outside his door, Schumacher waited with Dockery. They had left Pimm to guard the bound Hope, and were now after the biggest game of the lot—the owner. It had been part of Schumacher's carefully thought out plot from the beginning of things—to obtain control of Tom Carruthers' person, if only as a bargaining counter. And now, with the strong armed Dockery to aid, he was about to make his final spring.

The *Mariposa* was still quiet, her captain unconscious on the bridge, her watch below peacefully asleep and that on deck occupied only in an occasional inspection of the riding lights. But—there was no knowing how long the fortunate condition would endure; and Schumacher was in a hurry.

Carruthers' dream suddenly turned to one in which he was being urgently strangled. A great hand seemed to have closed on his throat, and to be choking the life out of him. With a throttled cry he awoke.

"Not a sound, damn you!" Dockery's lips were at his ear, and an uncomfortably suggestive affair of metal prodding him in the midriff.

"What the —" he gasped, beginning to struggle.

Schumacher said "Ach!" in the dark, and things for Carruthers were blotted out by a million stars. Once more the flat of an automatic, cunningly applied, had done its work. The unconscious form dropped limp between Dockery's hands.

"Now," Schumacher grunted. "*Schnell* —quick! Out of this!"

A procession of three flitting figures moved hurriedly down the *Mariposa's* darkened decks, the third of them carrying a bundle under each arm. There followed the sudden squeal of a fall in its blocks, a muttered curse: the splash of a boat in the water; the stumbling feet of the watch forward, alarmed at last, and his astonished bellow of "All hands!"; and then the boat was away into the swirling darkness, with Pimm and Dockery tugging frantically at an oar each, and the German peering ahead.

Behind them as they fled with their cargo they could see the *Mariposa's* lights spring up, and even hear the shouting and confusion as those on board discovered the happenings of the night. Schumacher turned his head over his shoulder and chuckled loud and deep.

"Aha!" he said. "Shout away, mine liddle fellows! Comes our turn now."

Ahead there was the reef, its shelves and ridges outlined in phosphorescence against the dark. Schumacher called to Dockery at the bow oar.

"Take out der gag und led us see what he says."

Dockery stopped rowing and reached behind him. With one enormous arm he yanked Hope out of the bows, twisted out the cloth with which his jaws had been muffled, and passed him over Pimm's head to Schumacher.

"There you are," he said. "But don't forget he's mine when you've done with him."

For a full minute Hope said nothing. He was too fully occupied trying to get the use of his jaw muscles back, since Dockery's gagging had been none of the gentlest nor the most considerate of anatomical structure. Schumacher watched him choking and retching for a moment, then passed him a flask.

"Take a liddle of that," he said.

Hope drank, gasped, and then began to swear in all the dialects and variants of Cockaigne. For a small man it was an astonishing effort, and even Dockery up in the bows was constrained to chuckle at its blistering completeness. Schumacher let him run for awhile and then pulled him up short.

"Enough, Hope," he said suddenly. "We haf other things to do but schwear. Where is der passage through der reef?"

The cockney laughed aloud.

"Well, I'll be sugared!" he said heartily. "Think I'm goin' to show you swine? Arter about 'arf breakin' me jaw? Not ruddy likely!"

Schumacher leaned forward in the dark.

"Listen," he said. "Id was unfordunade, yes, der business choost now—but for us der was no choice. Dockery, maybe, was a liddle rough—you and he musdt be friends yet—but in der hurry . . . You understand. Und in der meantime, see if dis cures dot jaw of yours."

He flashed his tiny torch for a moment on to his bundle of notes, and detached another three of them.

"Gompensation, *ja?*" He chuckled and held them out to the little cockney.

Hope began to laugh, in a different tone this time.

"Ho," he said. "Well, that's another matter, mister. I'll do what I can—but for Gawd's sake, next time you've any o' these little abductions up yer sleeve, let me know in good time. I b'lieve me jaw's come adrift."

"*Ja*," said Schumacher dryly. "Dot I can believe, too. But now about der passage, eh?"

Hope scrambled forward across Pimm and Dockery, who rumbled some unpleasantness as he went, and sat up in the bows. He peered into the dark in front of him.

"I'll do what I can," he said aloud. And under his breath he added, "An' that'll be somethin' surprisin', by the time I'm through with you!"

V

IT TOOK a good hour and more to navigate the intricacies of the reef. Hope's memory of the channel was good—not for nothing had he spent six months in a whaleboat in and out of those shoals—but the darkness, and with it the rising sea, made steering a tricky business at best, and half a dozen times Schumacher's heart was in his mouth as the boat scraped perilously by some spur of the coral.

He sat at the tiller, chewing his lip impatiently, and with his inner eye on the time. It was nearing three now, and by five at latest the light would be here. Then—there was not much doubt of it—the *Mariposa* would again take a hand in events. Mason, whose head was probably thick enough to have taken no great damage from the thump Schumacher had given it, would have recovered; and the first thing he would do would be to send a boat ashore. True, they had no Hope to conduct them through the passage; but even so, two hours in daylight should see them dangerously close.

If, that was—he glanced over his shoulder at the towering clouds behind him, and then at the rapidly rising sea—if the passage was passable at all. Anything like a heavy sea ought to make it impracticable for a ship's boat; in which case . . .

He called an inquiry up to Hope in the bows and got a reassuring answer. "No bloomin' chance," said the cockney. "This place is like a little bit of 'ell when there's any wind."

He resumed his peering out over the bow, calling "Port!" or "Starboard!" every few minutes as another shelf of coral came into view. Like Schumacher, he was busy with his head—although his thoughts were not on the storm. There was a piece of steering ahead of him—of steering clear of reefs other than mere coral—beside which his present occupation would be the merest child's play. There was wealth involved; wealth beyond all his cockney dreams; comfort, as he understood comfort, lashings of good food and good drink and not so good women—the possibility of splurging it in some secluded port of call as a man of means and substance . . . . Hope licked his sinful lips. And there was also a small matter of revenge to be considered and worked for—he had taken an instinctive scunner to the huge Dockery from the start, and there had been plenty of provocation from that quarter. He felt his aching jaws and scowled into the night, his brain working at top speed.

Carruthers stirred at his feet, and he called back to Schumacher once more.

" 'Ere," he said. "This cove's comin' to. Better look arter him, some one."

"No," said Schumacher. "Leave him alone. In awhile we see to him."

Dockery laughed brutally as he swung his weight into the oar.

"In awhile we'll be seein' to one or two gennlemen," he said. "An' they better be sayin' their prayers . . ."

Hope, immediately behind him, grinned to himself. This was a situation after his own stormy heart.

" 'Ere we are!" he cried suddenly, as the boat slid into more open water. "That's put you through. The beach is 'arf a mile in front."

As he spoke the rain, that had been stalking them for hours, came roaring upon them in a blinding sheet, and with

it the wind and thunder. In a second the waves of the lagoon were beaten flat, and the stabbing flicker of the electric discharges lighted up a vista of streaming sheets of water and milk-white boiling sea. Ahead, and very faint, they caught the loom of battered and wind-swept trees; then the rain closed down impenetrably, and the four men cowered under it, blind and half choked.

Schumacher was the first to pull himself together.

"Row, now!" he bawled at Pimm. "Hurry!"

Pimm shook the water out of his eyes, his white face shining in the lightning's blue gleam.

"Where to?" he shouted. "We're lost."

Schumacher cursed aloud.

"Do what I dell you!" he bellowed. "You, Dockery, row! While der rain lasdts, blockheads!"

Hope in the bows strained his eyes looking ahead as the boat surged forward. He had his scheme cut and dried by now —at least the immediate future of it; and he was waiting, waiting very anxiously for the boat's nose to touch the beach.

SHE RAN aground in a welter of light surf and rain. Dockery leaped out into the smother, took her by the bow and ran her up on to the sand, and Schumacher landed with Pimm.

"Dot's id, so far," he said, cupping his hands. "Now for der house."

"Hadn't we better be looking after our host, first?" asked Pimm. "We don't want to leave him behind, do we?"

Dockery leaned over into the boat.

"He's still cuckoo," he said. "You hit hard, Jacob."

Schumacher cursed again restlessly.

"For what do we stand here talking like old women?" he asked. "Drag him oudt, Dockery."

Carruthers was hauled from the bottom of the boat, limp and semi-conscious. Schumacher so far forgot his imperturbability as to deal him a kick in the ribs.

"So!" he said. "We find a use for you, maybe. In der meandime, Dockery, tie him up und leave him under der trees. We gome back for him, maybe. But quick! *Himmel*, dere is no dime to lose!"

The ropes that had once bound Hope lay in the boat, and Dockery soon had Carruthers tightly bound. He slung him sackwise across his shoulders and marched off through the driving rain to where the coco palms were being wrenched and bullied by the wind.

Pimm suddenly gripped Schumacher's arm.

"Jacob," he said, "where's Hope?"

The cockney had vanished. While the other three had been discussing Carruthers he had seized his opportunity—the opportunity he had been looking for—and slipped away. Thirty yards in the rain and driving spume, and he might as well have been back in Sydney for all the others could tell of his whereabouts.

In Jacob Schumacher's devious career there could have been few moments more poignant than this. After six weeks' hard work on the case—after the night's frantic gamble with fortune—after the final bribe to Hope—to discover after all that the little cockney had sold him was a terrific blow. He stood for an instant without words, the water streaming off him in floods, his dark figure bowed.

Pimm laughed bitterly against the howl of the wind.

"A pretty business, Jacob," he said between his teeth. "And now what are we going to do, eh? Wait here until daylight?"

Dockery had returned, and Pimm imparted the news to him. He glowered at the German.

"Damn nice feller you are," he said contemptuously. "Ought to have let me knock 'im on the head long ago. Well, wodjer goin' to do about it?"

Schumacher had recovered his poise by this time, and was facing the situation with the coolness that had taken him into and out of so many tight corners.

"Scatter," he said, "und search. Look for dot *schellum* Hope in der first blace—und if you find him, Dockery, bring him

to me, alife. Und in der second blace look for der house. Id is nod far, surely."

His ascendancy over the other two was complete, for they obeyed without a word of protest, Pimm taking the beach in one direction, Schumacher himself another, and the great Dockery plunging back into the trees once more. The search for Hope was from the beginning almost an impossibility, in the welter of wind and rain; but Pimm, after ten minutes ploughing his way against the gale, found himself within a yard or so of a godown and, exploring farther, drew the conclusion that this was the edge of the settlement of Cain's Reef.

He turned back toward the boat to report to Schumacher; and as he did so a squat figure with a great copper beard blowing wildly in the wind stepped suddenly out from behind the house and enfolded him in an anaconda-like embrace.

Pimm squirmed and struggled and fought to get at his pistol, but in Torrens' grip he was paralyzed. The big man shook him like a rat.

"Here's one of you, eh?" he growled. "Well, Mister Thief-in-the-Night, let's have a better look at you!"

He slipped suddenly behind Pimm, took both his shoulders in his iron fists, and propelled him in front of him with a remorseless knee.

"This way!" he said, and ran him up the narrow path.

Across the veranda of the bungalow he booted him, and into the living room, where a lamp hung from the ceiling.

"Now," he said, spinning Pimm round to face him, "who are you? And what the devil are you doing here?"

Pimm, albeit nothing of a hero, had his moments of rashness. He snatched at his gun without answering. Torrens leaned forward from the hips, precisely as he had done when winning the officers' middleweights forty years before in the Mediterranean, and took Pimm neatly under the jaw. Pimm went peaceably to sleep, like Mason and Carruthers; and Torrens flung him on a couch and went over him with a practised hand.

"H'm!" he said. "Armed, eh? And where there's one of your sort, my lad, there'll be others. I think I'll go out and have another look round."

He went to a cupboard in the wall and took out a heavy navy pattern revolver. As he was slipping it into the pocket of his drenched oilskins, the door opened and Wing Lee appeared, his mouth open and his brown eyes wide with surprise. Torrens turned to him.

"Here, Wing," he said. "Here's a job for you. Look after this fellow till I come back. If he wakes up, show him this." He handed the Chinese Pimm's revolver. "If he gives you any trouble, shoot him and charge it to me, Wing. Savvy?"

Wing Lee nodded and took the gun with some nervousness. Torrens rumbled in his throat and went out hurriedly into the teeming night.

Dockery and Schumacher waited cursing at the boat. Neither of them had found any trace of habitation in their search; and it was now ten good minutes since they had foregathered at the rendezvous to compare notes with Pimm. And there was no Pimm. Schumacher chewed his fingers, and Dockery delved into the depths of a cosmopolitan vocabulary to meet the situation.

Finally Schumacher spoke.

"Dere is no sense in dis, again," he said. "We musdt follow, und see what dere is. But go slow—slow und careful," he advised. "Gott he knows what may haf happened here."

They moved off along the beach, keeping close in the edge of the trees, and more or less well concealed by the still driving rain. For some minutes they moved so, Schumacher ahead, and Dockery close at his heels. Then the German swiftly sank to his knees, and Dockery instantly followed suit.

In front of them a dim figure was advancing along the windswept sand. It moved rapidly, clad in dripping oilskins, and a lightning flash as it passed within twenty feet of the hidden pair showed up its formidable beard.

Schumacher nudged Dockery.

"Misder John Torrens," he whispered.

Dockery raised his automatic, but the German gripped his wrist.

"No, no," he said hastily. "Led him go—he is better out of der way, *ja!*"

He got to his feet and began to run forward, crouching almost to the ground. In a few moments he and Dockery stood in the lee of buildings, dark and apparently untenanted—the sheds and godowns of John Torrens' establishment. The two halted a moment to prospect, and a light showed through the trees and the streaming rain. Schumacher advanced cautiously toward it.

Suddenly, high over the lashing of the rain, there came from within the sound of a shot. Schumacher, with Dockery at his heels, ran across the veranda of the bungalow and burst through the doorway.

VI

LEFT alone with the unconscious Pimm, Wing Lee looked down at the weapon in his hand with some doubt. A portly Chinese butler is not at his best with a revolver at any time, and the sudden apparition of this visitant, coupled with the roar of the storm outside, played something like havoc with his nerves. However, he stood his ground stoutly, his eye on Pimm.

That gentleman lay on the couch, his dark face, with the hair plastered wetly over his forehead, not unhandsome in the flickering light; Torrens had hit him very expertly, and Wing Lee had been watching him for some minutes when he stirred, opened his eyes, and blinked about him.

"Where am I?" The knockout victim's almost invariable first question came to his lips.

Then he saw the Chinese and recollection seemed to return to him. He rose to a sitting position and felt his jaw.

"Phew!" he said, with a smile in which calculation was beginning to appear again. "That was a smack! My head's all spinning yet."

He made as if to rise to his feet, but Wing Lee stopped him, the revolver directed somewhat shakily at his middle.

"No—" The Chinese's voice was firm enough, for all the wavering revolver. "You not move. You sit down, or I shoot."

Pimm relapsed on to the seat, his eyes narrowing.

"What's the meaning of this, you?" he demanded.

Wing Lee smiled without any excessive mirth.

"You bad man," he announced, wagging his head. "Come here steal pearls. Me like shoot you."

"Oh, you would eh?" Pimm was watching the plump and unwarlike figure, noting the flabby muscles and swag paunch, and gaging his chances of a quick spring. It took a good deal of screwing up of his nerves, however, to bring him to the point of facing a man with a loaded revolver, even if the man was old Wing Lee the Chinese.

"So you think I'm here after pearls?" he went on, temporizing.

Wing Lee nodded again.

"Me know," he asseverated complacently. "All bad mans coming here for pearls. No get. Pearls him lock in safe. Me watchee."

Pimm relaxed his tensed muscles with caution. A great, a stupendous idea had suddenly struck him. This old yellow man knew where the pearls were. What if he, Pimm, could— If only he was sure he would have time. He cast a quick glance round him to observe if he was seen or heard; then he grinned ingratiatingly at Wing Lee.

"You're a fine fellow," he said. "You watchee pearls, eh? Well, well—"

Incautiously the Chinese glanced at the office door, and gave Pimm his clue—just the trifling necessary piece of information he required.

With a single heave of his body he projected himself off the couch at Wing Lee's throat. There was the briefest of scuffles, during which the Chinese in desperation pressed the trigger and sent a

bullet ploughing, harmless, through the wall; and then Pimm had wrenched the pistol from him and was flourishing it under his astonished nose.

"Now," he said, "where are those pearls, you yellow swine? Show me."

And it was just on this situation—Pimm in charge and hounding the butler toward the door of the little office—that Schumacher and Dockery made their irruption. Pimm swung round to face them, with an unspoken curse on his lips; his chance had for the time gone. The German greeted him with an enigmatic smile.

"Ah," he observed. "So here you are, Pimm. We thought, Dockery and I, dot somedings had happened to you."

"So it did," snapped Pimm, rubbing his jaw. "Torrens did. And if you'll take my advice you'll avoid having him happen to you—he hits too hard to please me."

"Und who is our friend here?" Schumacher inquired, pointing to the Chinese.

"Don't know," said Pimm. "But I'm inclined to think he'll show us where the pearls are, if he's handled properly."

It was just as well, thought Pimm, to carry the situation off with an air; he did not like to envisage the possibilities if Schumacher once suspected him of playing a lone hand.

The German smiled once more in his manner of hateful superiority, and Pimm experienced a sensation of sinking.

"*Ja*, no doubt," said Schumacher. "Und you were just aboudt to experimendt, eh, in handling him? A very goot scheme, Pimm—an excellent scheme; but next dime I think you musdt wait for the rest of us, yes! Und now," he went on, "led us investigade."

He stopped, for both Pimm and Dockery stood like statues, their faces intent and startled. For a moment there was complete silence in the room, save for the tumult of the storm outside; and then they heard it again—the rattle of metal against metal, a hurried clink and jar, somewhere close at hand.

The three stared at one another, wild surmise in their countenances. Then Schumacher jumped to the door of the office and flung it open.

As he did so, there was a scuttle of hasty feet, a scrabble of hands on the wall, and a low chuckle, as a form, scarcely visible in the gloom of the office, hurled itself at the window and out into the wildness of the night.

"Hope, by God!" roared Dockery.

For the second time that night Schumacher's jaw dropped and he stood, his hands at his sides. Pimm was still holding the Chinese at the muzzle of his pistol, too occupied to appreciate what had passed; and it was left for the great Dockery to act.

"After him!" he bellowed. "Out of the window! He's got them pearls, the dirty little thief!"

He rushed out of the room, crossed the veranda in two strides, and was gone into the blackness outside. Schumacher made to follow him, but turned back to Pimm.

"Gome on," he said savagely. "What are you waiding for?"

Pimm was standing irresolute, looking at the Chinese.

"This is your work, you ugly devil!" he said bitterly. "But I'll be even with you yet.'"

Schumacher gripped him by the arm.

"Gome with me," he said, suddenly dropping his voice almost to a whisper. "Dere are one or two liddle explanations you musdt make, Pimm, before you ged even with der Chinaman. But der time is not now."

Pimm threw him a sharp glance and, seeing in the German's sallow face something that did not ease his own fears at all, followed him out into the dark.

CARRUTHERS came to himself, his head throbbing and buzzing from the effects of Schumacher's blow with the pistol barrel. He found himself drenched and shivering, bound hand and foot, and lying on the ground under a grove of rocking palms. He was alone, and for some minutes he was fully occupied in

striving to orient himself to these strange surroundings.

His last recollection had been his cabin on the *Mariposa*, and the yacht's peaceful and orderly routine. He remembered with a flash of comprehension the events of the afternoon before—the encounter between the berserk Dockery and Hope, Mason's warnings, the matter of arms aboard the vessel, his own scarcely awakened suspicions that all was not entirely as it should be. And as he lay on the soaked earth and listened to the wail of the wind in the trees above him, he came to the conclusion that affairs had considerably outrun him.

Carruthers was, as has been said, a dilettante in many ways, but there was a strain of toughness in him, and he reacted instantly to his situation. Painfully he rolled over so as to get a view about him, and to get a better purchase on the ropes that bound his hands. Of view there was none, save for a glimpse now and then through the rain of the water's edge and the wind whipped surface of the lagoon; the boat was invisible to him, hidden behind a clump of low bushes.

He began to wrench at the ropes; but Dockery's knots were tied with a skill that defied all his efforts, and finally he desisted with a groan, and lay motionless, waiting for what might turn up next. That this was not the end of his night's adventures—whatever had been their sequence so far—he was certain enough. Cain's Reef, for this must be Cain's Reef, had more to say to him yet.

By and by he commenced to wriggle himself forward, until he was clear of the trees and lying out on the edge of the open sand. It was better, he reflected, to be in the clear, with a view—such as it was—on all sides of him, than to remain hidden and helpless in the undergrowth. For twenty or thirty yards he squirmed so, and then raised his head to reconnoitre.

He dropped it again instantly, and lay motionless on the sand. A dim figure was advancing on him through the rain, clad in a garment that flapped about its legs and moving with long, vigorous strides. At any rate, this was none of the *Mariposa's* company.

Torrens almost fell over him.

"What the devil!" Carruthers heard him mutter to himself. "Another of 'em, eh?"

He stooped and yanked the bound man to his feet.

"Who are you, friend?" he asked gruffly, taking in Carruthers' plight at once. "Seem to be in some kind of trouble, anyhow. There are a queer lot of visitors on Cain's Reef tonight, it seems to me."

"Cut me loose," said Carruthers, "and maybe I can tell you."

Torrens produced a knife and severed the cords.

"Now," he said, "I may as well tell you, to avoid misunderstandings, that I've got you covered and that I'm standing no nonsense from any one. I've already settled with one of your crowd tonight. Who are you, and where do you come from?"

Carruthers told him hastily the events, as far as he remembered them, of the night. Torrens heard him in silence.

"H'm," he said finally. "Sounds a likely tale. Got any proof of it?"

Carruthers laughed, in spite of his discomfort.

"No, Mr. Torrens," he said. "You'll have to take my word for it, I'm afraid. I'd show you my yacht out there, if it wasn't for the rain."

Torrens chuckled.

"You're honest, at all events," he admitted. "How'd you know my name, by the way? I'm not used to visitors here."

Carruthers told him, and Torrens exploded suddenly at mention of the cockney.

"Hope!" he exclaimed. "Is that little swine with you?"

Carruthers nodded.

"There are one or two queer people with me, I'm afraid," he confessed. "And by the way, you'd better keep an eye on those pearls of yours. It looks very much

to me as if this business was planned from the start."

Torrens took him by the arm.

"Fair warning, anyhow," he said. "You'd better come with me up to the house and see what's happening to the fellow I left there."

"You left there?" asked Carruthers, mystified.

"Yes," said Torrens. "Ran into him in the dark, twenty minutes ago. Ought to have put a bullet into him then, only like a fool I wasn't armed. Tried to draw on me, so I knocked him out and left my Chinese butler to take care of him. Dark, clean shaven chap—"

Carruthers began to hobble along the beach.

"That's Pimm," he said. "And there are another three to be accounted for yet. We'd better get back. They're a dangerous crew, or I'm badly mistaken."

Torrens threw an arm about his shoulder for support, and the two men ran along the beach.

All at once, away among the dark trees to their right, and high above the storm, there rose a mighty bellowing voice in curses and objurgations addressed apparently to some unseen object. The words were unintelligible, a mere frothing torrent of profanity; but to Carruthers the voice was recognizable enough. He stopped.

"Dockery," he said to Torrens.

The voice continued for all of a minute, raging and raving like that of a furious beast; listening, the two on the shore could almost hear the crash of branches and the floundering of the great fellow's limbs.

Torrens made as if to investigate.

"What hell's own bobbery's loose now?" he growled, starting toward the trees.

Carruthers took a pace after him, and then stopped as if he had received a bullet in the brain. The enormous voice suddenly trailed off into a choking yell, wavered a moment on that note of shrill agony and surprise, and then abruptly ceased. The hammer of the implacable rain continued.

Torrens checked his long strides and turned over his shoulder to Carruthers once more.

"Know what that was?" he asked. "That was a knife did that—there's no mistaking the sound, once you've heard it."

"It was Dockery," said Carruthers.

"Dockery," Torrens answered. "But who knifed him?"

"Hope," Carruthers spoke with certainty; he remembered the little cockney on the *Mariposa*.

"Quite probable," agreed Torrens. "He's just the kind of reptile that does carry a knife. Well, we can't stand about here waiting for Mr. Hope and his affairs. There are a hundred and fifty thousand pounds worth of pearls up in the house—and it occurs to me we'd better just see how they're getting on in all this."

The lamp burned steadily in the empty room. Torrens cast one look about him, taking in the absence of Pimm and, in the office, the empty safe.

"My God!" he said.

There was a rustle in the corner and a fat worm of a figure emerged from beneath a table. It was Wing Lee the butler, and his teeth chattered like castanets. Torrens pounced on him.

"You misbegotten son of a she-turtle!" he cried. "What you do there? Where pearls? Out with it, ye slit eyed *soor!*"

The Chinese writhed in an agony of apprehension as Torrens shook him.

"Men he come," he said. "One, two, three. Take pistol from Wing. Say he tell 'um where pearls. Wing no tell. Other damn fella he get in office by window, I think. Take pearls. All run like hell. No savvy more."

Torrens dropped him and took a rapid glance about the room once more.

"Well," he said to Carruthers. "They're gone."

"Was the safe locked?" asked Carruthers.

Torrens smote his hand on his thigh.

"Yes," he said. "It was. And there's just one of that outfit who could possibly

have had the combination, and that's that thieving, murdering little scoundrel, Hope."

He and Carruthers looked at one another, and then nodded.

"It looks to me," said Torrens ruefully, "as if I'll have the pleasure of strangling Mr. Hope yet."

VII

HOPE stooped over Dockery and pulled his knife out from between the shoulder blades.

"Yah!" he said under his breath. "That's for you, mister! You'd cross Bert 'Ope, would yer? Well, you ain't come to no good over it, 'ave yer, cully? Lie there an' rot, yer big swine."

He wiped the knife on a handful of leaves, and looked about him among the trees where Dockery had sighted him momentarily and run roaring to his end.

"Now, look 'ere, Mister 'Ope," he went on to himself. "It's about time for you to be gettin' out o' this. Tain't no ways 'ealthy—there's too many people about; an' these 'ere pearls ain't the easiest things in the world to 'ide, either. An' then there's Mister John Torrens—'e's on the job somewhere. An' I ain't anxious to run across 'im—no, that I ain't!"

He stood in the middle of the little clearing, scratching his chin. In his battered garments, clinging to him with the wet, the knife stuck in his belt and the steel jewel cases under one arm, he looked a fierce enough spectacle to have intimidated the most courageous; and now he added to his equipment as a sudden thought struck him. He turned Dockery over with his foot and appropriated his pistol.

"Ain't no more use to you, cully," he said with a twisted grin. "An' it looks to Bert 'Ope as if 'e might need it, by the time all's done."

He stole away cautiously through the trees, moving as one familiar with the ground. There was the faintest hint of dawn in the air, and the rain seemed to be slackening its fury; Hope could almost distinguish the well known outlines of buildings, and the line of the beach with the whaleboats drawn up in an orderly row. He was making for that beach; there should be, he remembered, half a dozen light canoes, outriggers, drawn up with the rest. One of those, a few hours' start, a day's paddle along shore—then land and cut across the atoll's narrow neck and so to open sea on the other side of the island; and after that, let things take care of themselves.

As for Pimm and Schumacher, and Carruthers and John Torrens, they could go to the devil, once they had spent sufficiently long in hunting one another in circles about Cain's Reef. Torrens, he figured, once he had missed his pearls would inevitably lay the blame at the door of the others. There was nothing in that alarming person's mind to connect Bert Hope with the theft; or wouldn't be until Schumacher and Pimm had been fought to a standstill and Carruthers made contact with Torrens to tell him the story. And even then, why should Torrens believe them?

He calculated thus as he moved, short rush by short rush, toward the shore. Away to his left, he knew, was the Kanaka village—a hundred yards back in the trees, and he need look for no trouble from that quarter for an hour or more. Torrens policed the bungalow and the surrounding huts himself as a rule, and there were strict orders against the Kanakas being about the place after dark. He had an instinctive fear of the red bearded man entirely awake in him, and it was his figure that was clear in his mind as he stole, yard by yard, down to the beach and the much desired canoe.

And it was thus that he did not see Schumacher until a blinding flash at arm's length range and a terrific shock told him that for once he had been overconfident—and with Schumacher once was enough.

The German knelt at his side and wrenched the pearl cases from under his arm. Then, leaving Hope a prostrate bundle on the ground, he vanished into

the reeking mist that was beginning to rise from the soaked foliage. As he went he chuckled once more. They had not beaten Jacob Schumacher yet.

The rain and wind were beginning to let up a little as Pimm and Schumacher had left the bungalow. As Hope had found, moving cautiously away with the pearls, it was just possible to discern the shapes of trees and buildings, and there was a hint of dawn in the air. Schumacher hurried his companion on in a gloomy silence, until they stood clear of the houses and hutments of Torrens' settlement. Then he halted and turned to him.

"Now," he said, "we part, Pimm. Make for der boat und wait for me. Und also look to see if der Herr Carruthers is all well. You find him under der tree still, no doubt. Knock him on der head—he is dangerous now. Look also for dis John Torrens. Und—" he suddenly threw a savage note into his voice—"no more tricks, Herr Pimm. I am watching you, see!"

"And where are you going?" asked Pimm.

"I? I hunt der pearls, of course. You think I leave them with dot *schellum* Hope?"

"But you'll never find him! He's a mile away by now—and what about Dockery? He'll be running after him, I suppose, with his silly mouth open."

"Dockery is—"

Schumacher started to speak, but broke off short. Close at hand, not a hundred yards away in the trees, Dockery's frantic outcry of rage shocked the morning. Schumacher listened an instant, and said "Aha!" in the tone of one who remarks, "I told you so!" Then he stopped again and stood glaring in the direction of the sound. The roar changed to a scream of pain, faded away suddenly, and there was silence.

Neither Schumacher nor Pimm said a word for a moment. Then the German whipped out his revolver, called to Pimm, "To der boat—run!" and fled headlong toward the sound.

PIMM ran along the beach. It was light enough now to distinguish objects at close range, and the *Mariposa's* eighteen footer loomed large at the edge of the lagoon. He took a glance at her, and then went quickly up the shore to the tall trees under which Dockery had left the erstwhile unconscious Carruthers. For several minutes he searched for the *Mariposa's* owner, his mind running furiously on the events of the night, and particularly on his own thwarted attempt to get in first at the pearls. He wondered just how much Jacob Schumacher suspected—and was uncomfortable at the thought. The German was not a person to cross, particularly when it came to a treasure the size of the one on Cain's Reef . . .

Cursing and muttering to himself, he combed the undergrowth for Carruthers; and then, once again, he stood as if petrified as a shot rang out through the morning. Next moment he had abandoned his search for Carruthers, doubled down the beach to the boat, and with his shoulder to the bow thrust the light craft into the water.

Schumacher appeared, running for dear life. He tumbled over the boat's bow.

"Push off!" he gasped. "Push off—und row like der devil!"

He flung the three steel cases on the seat in the stern, and grinned triumphantly at Pimm.

Torrens and Carruthers looked down at Hope lying before them. Schumacher's shot had brought them to the scene at the double, but too late to intercept the elusive German, and too late, it appeared, to do anything for the cockney, who seemed to have terminated his career at last. Schumacher's bullet had hit him high up in the chest, and he was breathing in heavy gasps.

Torrens dropped on one knee at his side.

"So it's you," he said gruffly as Hope opened his eyes. "I told you you'd come to a bad end, Hope. Who did this?"

The cockney summoned up the flicker of a twisted smile.

"Mister bloomin' Schumacher," he said. "'E got me to rights—an' I'm a fool after all. Get along after 'im, now, the two o' you. I'll—I'll be all right 'ere."

"Where's he gone?" asked Torrens.

Hope jerked a weak finger toward the sea.

"Boat," he said. "They'll try an' get out o' it that way, sure. There ain't nothin' else for 'em to do. Cut along now, quick. An' you'll catch 'em before they've gone far."

Torrens looked at Carruthers.

"Here," he said. "Nip into the house and get Wing Lee out to look after this. We can't leave him so."

The still trembling Chinese hurried up and took charge of Hope, while Torrens waited impatiently for Carruthers.

"Now," he said, "come on—and look out for squalls. You armed, by the way?" Carruthers shook his head, and Torrens bent over Hope once more.

"I thought as much," he said, producing the pistol that had been Dockery's. "If you need it, you'll need it badly. Hurry, now!"

And the pair ran down to the landing beach.

Between them, unskilled as they were, Pimm and Schumacher made the light boat fly over the water. The lagoon was still shrouded in mist—the dawn bank that hangs low before the trade wind rises with the sun—and visibility to seaward was almost non-existent.

Neither spoke until they had put two good miles of rowing between themselves and the settlement. Then Schumacher rested on his oars and laughed aloud.

"So!" he said. "Und dot's dot—so far!"

He fell silent once more, staring impassively out over the misty water, and apparently almost oblivious of Pimm's presence.

"Where's Dockery?" asked the latter.

Schumacher woke up, grunted, and flicked a thumb upward.

"In heaven, I subbose," he said. "With six inches of a knife in his back—Hope's knife."

"And Hope?"

"Aha! He was a liddle careless, dot Misder Hope. He also is nod very active any more. Und Carruthers, eh? You finished him, I subbose. Dot is one, two, three gone—leaves two here, Pimm und John Torrens alone, aha!"

There was a kind of savage glee in the German's enumeration of the casualties, and Pimm shuddered in spite of himself as he answered—

"Carruthers wasn't where we left him, Jacob."

Schumacher swung round on him again, his face a livid mask.

"Once more!" he ejaculated. "Musdt I always be disobeyed. *Du lieber Gott*, Pimm!"

"Well, I couldn't help it," said Pimm sulkily. "He wasn't there. He'd come to, like as not, and crawled off into the trees somewhere."

"*Ja*, with Dockery's ropes on him! Pimm, you are a fool."

"Maybe," Pimm agreed venomously. "But I'm not such a fool as to be sitting here worrying my head off about Carruthers. We've got the pearls, anyway."

"*Ja!*" Schumacher's contempt cut like a knife. "Und we have also—thanks to you, Pimm—two men on our drail instead of one, und Carruthers tells Torrens just which way we musdt go, und we lose two, three hours start. See, Pimm? Und we have no food nor water, eh, Pimm? Und outside dere is der yacht—*nicht wahr*, Pimm?—dot waidts for us to surrender. Und it is murder dis time, Pimm. We haf der pearls, eh? Pimm, you are a fool."

He took his oar once more and resumed his indomitable pulling. Pimm threw a puzzled glance at him—he had not heard the German despair before and the experienee was a strange one; and then he too bent his back to the work and fell into stroke with Schumacher.

Behind them, Torrens was lustily haranguing a couple of sleepy Kanakas, and preparing a whaleboat for the chase of the fugitives. He seemed all of a sudden to have dropped his furious haste,

and was going about the affair with a methodical deadliness.

"They can't get far," he told Carruthers. "There's no settlement within thirty miles either way, and then only Kanaka villages. They've run their heads into a trap."

"Suppose they land and make a bolt for it that way?" asked Carruthers.

Torrens smiled a trifle grimly.

"Let's hope they don't," he said. "There are some things about Cain's Reef that would make it a pity if they did."

"Such as—?" Carruthers inquired interestedly. Torrens told him briefly.

"So you see," he concluded, "I most certainly don't want either of them to try any short cut of that nature. Anyhow, I've got other plans for them."

He threw a leg across the whaleboat's gunwale.

"Push off," he ordered, and sat down; to fall to unreeving a new coil of manila rope . . .

VIII

THE SUN was well up above the coco palms and rapidly absorbing the veils and whorls of mist from Cain's Reef. Pimm and Schumacher, still bending to their oars, were beginning to show signs of the strain, and Pimm's haggard face told a tale of weariness that must sooner or later end in collapse. Astern there was nothing in sight as yet—a mere vista of little bays and promontories, edged with queerly tinted sands, and of the lagoon's long stretches with the rim of breaking surf to seaward. Very far away they had seen the *Mariposa*—a toy ship at anchor outside—and Schumacher had grunted at the sight; but he was beyond grunting now and pulled with savage determination, with neither word nor glance for the man in the bow. Pimm's pale face grew paler under the sweat, and Schumacher looked like a ghost or a goblin, with his hunched shoulders, set teeth and big spectacles.

At last Pimm dropped his oar and slumped over it.

"I'm done, Jacob," he said weakly.

Schumacher stopped rowing and stood up, looking astern under his hand.

"So!" he said again, a note of finality creeping into his hoarse voice. "We musdt land, then."

"Land?" Pimm almost shrieked. "And walk straight into their arms?"

Schumacher regarded him with a sudden intentness.

"*Ja*," he said. "You are a fool, Pimm. Dere is nothing else we can do."

He picked up an oar and swung the boat's head for the beach.

"Look astern, fool!" he snapped. "Dot's why—" He pointed to a dark speck in the distance. "Dis is der end, maybe."

The boat's nose grounded softly in a patch of gray sand, and Schumacher leaped hastily overside. Pimm stood erect, his eyes on the advancing whaleboat, just distinguishable amid the opalescent mists down the coast.

"Hand me der pearls, Pimm," said Schumacher suddenly.

The cases were still on the stern thwart and Pimm stooped forward to pick them up. As he did so Schumacher whipped out his automatic and shot him through the heart from behind.

The body collapsed slowly into the bottom of the boat, and Schumacher, with a look of hate and contempt distorting his face, leaned past it and drew the three cases toward him one by one. He was nearly up to his knees in the water.

"Aha," he said aloud. "So dot is der end of you, Misder Pimm. Und now—" he turned to make for the shore—"Herr Doktor Jacob Schumacher, id is time for you to go!"

He took a pace toward the trees, stumblingly, haltingly, as if dragging his feet with increasing trouble. Then he stopped, just at the water's edge, and within five yards of the beached boat; a puzzled expression appeared on his face, and he swore under his breath as he strove to lift first one foot and then the

other. Then he seemed to subside all at once as far as the knees, and remained there, his body writhing and twisting frantically from the thighs upward, his dark features an odd admixture of hate, fear, and confused rage.

The quicksand—commonplace enough in the coral seas and, as Torrens knew well enough, an excellent ally as guardian of Cain's Reef—had him in its grip, and Schumacher might as well have struggled against Fate itself. He was held and held fast.

Under his arm were still the jewel cases, and behind him Pimm's hand protruded over the boat's gunwale, as if in a gesture of derisive farewell. For a few moments or more the German struggled in silence, sinking deeper into the shifting sand; now it was up to his loins and he rolled his eyes wildly about him, and strained and wrenched every muscle for a steady foothold.

Finally he appeared to give up, as the rattle of rowlocks and the splash of oars came from behind him. He stood passive, nearly waist deep in the clutching quicksand, his somber eyes fixed on the trees in front of him, and the pearls still gripped under one arm. So Jacob Schumacher, the last of the triumvirate, sullenly awaited whatever fortune might be about to bring him.

TORRENS checked his sweating Kanakas and pointed to the distant boat at the water's edge.

"Ah!" he said with a kind of wrathful satisfaction. "I thought as much. Well, that's the end of 'em—we can't miss them now."

Carruthers was staring ahead under his hand, as if puzzled. He turned suddenly to Torrens.

"Look at that!" he said, pointing to the motionless Schumacher.

Torrens said not a word to the Kanakas, and the boat ran forward of its own momentum; the only sound was the trickle of water from the dripping oar blades. Carruthers and the red bearded man stared at the strange scene before them.

"But what's Schumacher doing?" Carruthers inquired curiously.

Torrens chuckled.

"You don't know our quicksands hereabouts," he said. "Once they hold, they don't let go. That's what I meant when I said just now that I hoped they didn't make a bolt for it by land."

He glowered at Schumacher's back.

"But we'll have to have him out of that," he said. "He's got my pearls under his arm at this minute and, anyhow, I'm inclined to be curious about how he'd look in the slack of a rope."

"Better be careful," said Carruthers.

Torrens snorted.

"Careful—of him!" he cried. "Redman would have made ten of him—and I hung Redman at three minutes notice. Careful, indeed!"

He hailed Schumacher in a brazen bellow across the placid water.

"Ahoy, you!" he called. "Hold on—we want you!"

Schumacher turned a blank face on them as the whaleboat nosed into the treacherous shore. He was fast to the hips by now, and slowly sinking, but every trace of expression had been carefully ironed out of his parchment-like face, and he said no word. Torrens threw the rope up to Carruthers in the bow.

"Chuck him that," he said, "and we'll haul him out. You—Schumacher—catch!"

He seemed to be entirely unaffected by the corpse of Pimm in the *Mariposa's* boat within ten feet of him, and only concerned with getting Schumacher out of his perilous situation.

The German slipped the noose over his head and under his arms—shifting the position of the steel cases as he did so, but making no sound or sign that he recognized Carruthers or Torrens. Carruthers with one of the Kanakas tailed on to the loose end, while Torrens with the other held the whaler steady with oars thrust into the sand.

"Now—heave!" cried the red bearded man.

Little by little Schumacher was drawn from his trap. First his thighs appeared, then his knees; then finally he was able to take a tottering step.

"And that does it!" said Carruthers, momentarily forgetting the situation and the dead man in the other boat.

Schumacher's locked face suddenly broke into a hateful smile. He flung the pearls from him with a splash into the water, plucked out his pistol, and to the accompaniment of a roar of rage from Torrens fired it pointblank into Carruther's face. As he pulled the trigger Torrens with the strength of an elephant whirled the oar blade at him. There was a crack, and Schumacher fell forward on top of Carruthers, half in and half out of the boat.

Torrens leaped overboard without a word, and groped frantically on the treacherous surface for his precious steel cases.

Sometime later Carruthers came to himself in the cool living room of the bungalow. Wing Lee the Chinese was bending over him with a drink, and as he moved he found that his head was bound up and throbbed abominably. Across the room there was another cot, and Hope's beady little eye took him in from it.

"'Ullo, cully!" said the cockney cheerfully. "Come round, eh? Well, that was a narrer shave, from what they tell me. 'E nearly got both of us, did Mister Schumacher."

"What happened to him?"

"'Im? Oh, 'e got 'is all right. Told you 'e would, if 'e mixed it with John Torrens. 'E's dead, is Mister Schumacher. So's Pimm. So's Dockery." He grinned reminiscently. "An' I'm the only one of 'em left, 'cept you, of course. It ain't wise to monkey with this 'ere Cain's Reef—there's trouble seems to 'ang about it, some'ow."

Torrens came to the door at the sound of voices. He was once more immaculate in his starched whites, and the great copper beard seemed more formidable than ever.

"Well," said he, "You're looking up, eh? Lucky for you I managed to catch Schumacher a welt across the head when I did—your number was up, otherwise."

Carruthers propped himself on an elbow.

"What happened to Schumacher?" he asked curiously. Torrens looked slightly sheepish.

"Ah, yes," he said. "That was unfortunate. I'd have given quite a deal to have had that gentleman swinging in the bight of a rope. But the fact is, I seem to have hit him harder than I intended—caught him sidewise with the edge of the oar blade, and he was dead with a broken neck when we came to look at him."

"And the pearls?" asked Carruthers.

"Safe and sound," said Torrens. "And now," he went on, "your skipper's been on my collar all day to have you off to the yacht, and I'm not sure he's not right. You'd better go—and take this little scamp Hope with you. Just one thing, though. I suppose you'll not be this way again for some time?"

"When you like," said Carruthers.

"A month from now, then," Torrens said. "You can give me a cast out, back to civilization again. I'm—I'm getting a trifle old for this sort of thing—and for Cain's Reef, too."

BEAUSÉANT GOES FORWARD

By HAROLD LAMB

A Narrative of the Crusades

FAIR was the coast of the Holy Land. Never had it been more fair than in the years that followed 1240. Pilgrims, coming in the spring and autumn fleets, found here the peace that was not known at home.*

They did not find, it is true, the kingdom of Jerusalem, about which their grandsires had talked. Saladin had shattered that, and the great German emperor had taken the crown to add to his regalia.

The parts of the kingdom now had lords of their own—the beautiful island of Cyprus had its king and court, and in the northern coast Antioch had isolated itself. The coast of the Holy Land was held by the strong hands of the Hospital and the Temple, although the old

* European princes were occupied with their own wars, and the Papacy, after the death of Innocent III, with religious conflict. The Crusaders in Palestine were left to fare as best they could.

Crusader families clung to their fiefs.

Pilgrim galleases now sailed often into the stone walled harbor of Château Pelerin. This was the stronghold of the Templars that the Arabs called Athlit—built upon the black hard rock at the sea's edge. Half out upon the sea and half upon the land its tawny limestone walls towered skyward. Within its port, galleys were drawn up on the sand, and within its outer barrier wall, orange groves and fig trees cast a welcome shade.

Here the pilgrims from the homelands found unwonted comforts. In the castle hospice they could store their belongings and sleep upon clean pallets. They ate in the long refectory, cooled by the sea air and the thick stone walls, looking out upon a terrace where the officers of the Temple could be seen in talk, wearing the somber mantles of the order. They had the administration of the castle *casals*, or village lands, the care and transport of the crops, the lading and discharging of the cargo vessels. Moreover, they had now to act as bankers, to discount bills of exchange brought by Italian merchants and to pay silver to the pilgrims against the money orders brought from the commanderies of the Temple in France.

At matins and at vespers the pilgrims mingled with the tonsured warriors, bearded and sun darkened, wearing the red cross upon their weather stained surcoats — kneeling against the carved benches of the white marble church that had been built in the very shape of the *Templum Domini* at Jerusalem.

The pilgrims found that Château Pelerin was hostel and almshouse, port and monastery, bank and fortress. They had never seen anything of the kind before. And they marveled much at the great stables built underground, from which hundreds of horses were led out for the knights to ride on patrol, or the voyagers to journey down the coast.

Some of them, perhaps, went north to the smoke darkened cavern where Elijah had taught under the height of Carmel, or to embattled Acre with its terraced palaces—where of nights the elder men and minstrels related the saga of King Richard and the Sultan Saladin.

Upon the dusty road they met Moslems in from the desert, sitting sidewise on the leading camels while behind them long strings of camels swayed from side to side under heavy bales that smelled of spice and wool and sesame. Even when the pilgrims lay at night within roadside hostels, they heard the distant clanking of the camel bells. When they asked how the Arabs came to be free of Christian roads, they were told that the Templars followed a policy of peace with the Moslems, and that they were friends with the men of the sultan of Damascus.

Other travelers walked beside them, gray friars barefoot in the dust, wandering cheerily from village to village and sleeping with the dogs and all the fleas, or thin, stately Syrians who knew more of the Scriptures by memory than the priests; stout Turks riding small horses and followed by women that seemed to be animated bundles of black veils. The women walked and carried the burdens, for a true Turk would not burden his horse.

Italian merchants, arrogant in black velvets, rode under parasols upheld by slaves, while behind them appeared the mules and carts bearing their goods. Parties of Jews came by, clamoring in loud talk when no one was near, but walking in discreet silence past the cavalcade of a Christian knight.

ALWAYS the pilgrims were glad in the great church of Bethlehem. Here they were treading the ground that the Magi had trod, and they threw themselves down to kiss the threshold.

Quiet and most seemly was this place to their eyes. The sunlight, striking through windows of painted glass, cast a mellow glow into every corner. Tears came into the eyes of the wanderers, beholding such beauty in the place that was, of all places, the most joyous.

"*Ave Maria, gratia plena,*" their lips murmured.

They looked up at the soaring arches, hearing an echo of their prayer in the space above them. They had cast off their shoes; they had fasted, but heavy upon them they felt the burden of the sins of life that they had brought with them to this church of the blessed Mary. Some of them knelt by the white marble barrier of the choir, not daring to go on.

They who ventured behind the choir passed between two groups of slender twisted columns; they descended a stair worn hollow by other feet before them until they came out within a crypt where candles burned. They saw a gold star set in the marble paving of the crypt. Beside the star stood a man in armor, but wearing no sword. He did not move or speak to them as they went to kneel at the side of the crypt that opened downward into darkness.

In this spot the Magi had knelt, when the marble flooring had been the earth floor of a stable. The pilgrims went back into the golden light of the church.

"*Laetare Regina Coeli,*" they sang. And they rejoiced as they sang, because no man could visit this place, of all the places on the earth, and not feel glad. They lingered in the long nave, touching the walls with their hands, loath to go out across the threshold again. When the light grew dim and the echoes quickened in the arches above them, they went forth.

They were the last to behold the church of Bethlehem as the hands of the Crusaders had built it.

SOME of the pilgrims abode at the northern headquarters of the Hospital, Marghab—the Outpost, as the Arabs called it. This had just been completed, and to the visitors it appeared a very marvel of strength.

Marghab could be seen for leagues, since it crowned the summit of a solitary hill, two thousand feet above the sea. Built of black basalt, upon foundations that extended far into the ground, its towers overhung the steep slopes of the hill. Men pointed with pride to its Great Tower, out-thrust from the end of the citadel, mightier in girth than any other tower built by human hands.*

"We climbed," one of the Crusaders relates, "to Margat,† a vast castle and well fortified, having a double circuit of walls strengthened by many towers that seemed rather to have been shaped to hold up the sky than to add to the defense of this place—for the mountain on which the castle stands is most high, and appears like Atlas to sustain the firmament. The slopes of the mountain are well cultivated, and the crops of its lands amount to five hundred loads each year. Often the enemy attempted to plunder these rich harvests, but always in vain.

"This castle held in check the Old Man of the Mountain, and the sultan of Aleppo, so much so that in spite of the many castles they owned, they were forced to pay to it an annual tribute of two thousand marks, to keep the peace. Every night, to prepare for any eventuality and to guard against treachery, four knights and twenty-eight soldiers mounted guard. In time of peace, besides the ordinary *habitués* of the place, the Hospitallers keep there a garrison of a thousand men, and the citadel is provisioned with all needful things for five years."

The Arabs said that Marghab was impregnable—except to the angels. And even to the end it was never taken by assault.

There the Hospitallers kept open house. In the evenings after vespers a varied company gathered about the supper tables, where the knights sat in the black habit of the order, and the youths served them with meat and wine and fruit. They were all men of gentle blood, the sons of

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* The Great Tower of Marghab is about 100 feet in diameter, and its walls are some 50 feet in thickness. It is standing almost intact today.

† The Crusaders called it Margat, and apparently the Arabs christened it with a name similar in sound. In this part of Syria the hillsides are terraced for cultivation. These terraces, in the thirteenth century must have been down near the base of the mountain, because the summit is very rocky. Marghab could not have lacked for water, because even today there is a well at the summit, and the ruin of a reservoir a little way down the slope. The present writer made an examination of the place and believes that an underground passage led from the castle to the reservoir.

nobles, and they had come from so many lands that they were divided into different "tongues"—German, Italian, French and Provençal, English and Catalan and Spanish.

The Crusaders, their guests, seated by the officers, wondered at the talk, for the Hospitallers had read, some of them, the Arab poets and the geographer Idrisi.

The same Templars, the knights of the Hospital said, had become their hereditary rivals. For one thing the Templars were mostly French and mostly soldier-monks, while at the tables of the Hospital sat the younger sons of all Europe's nobility. The Hospitallers collected a road toll from the bands of Templars who rode past Marghab's hills, and in their turn the Templars charged the white cross men a high price for the salt that was mined near Château Pelerin.

At the table of the Hospital, the talk ran on the new silver map of the world that Idrisi was etching at the court of Palermo; they had libraries of Arabic works—forbidden by Rome. They mentioned Muhammad lightly, without crossing themselves, and they argued deftly with the priests who came out as pilgrims —the priests who still said that the Arabs were servants of Mahound, to be hunted down and slain.

The nobles of the Hospital had found the Arabs cultured gentlemen, very wise in matters of politics and medicine—the Hospital, which had its first aid work to do, took a professional interest in that—and much better company than the priests who talked of war. Of necessity, the Arab amirs and the Hospitallers fought at times, but they did not carry the war around with them.

Gay was the talk, and strong the red wine of Cyprus. At any hour the men at the table might be called upon to lead a foray across the border, and they made the most of the hours that were left to them. Their master was captive to the sultan of Cairo, and many of their brethren who had been sent south in the last campaign had come back lying under their shields. And the drinkers knew that their time also would come, when the stone cutters would carve their names upon stone.

They knew the secrets of the frontier—how the friendly sultan of Damascus had granted land to the Templars to gain the pledge of their aid. And they mocked the luxurious life of the nobles in Cyprus who had the sea between them and the enemy. The men of Cyprus had made the island safe for trade, indeed. They stained their hair red with henna like the women—aye, and their finger nails. They had so much money that after they had built French cathedrals in the pine forests, they could afford to marry Venetian wives. The Venetians were licking their chops over the island, and some day they would gulp it down.

Meanwhile the Hospitallers had to go hunting for the Assassins in their hills, and follow venturesome pilgrims to see that they did not come to harm.

IT HAPPENED with the swiftness of a storm in summer. And it was over almost before the tidings of it had gone across the sea.

The Crusaders had had some warning. For the last three years the Moslems of Damascus—Arabs of Saladin's clans—has told the Hospitallers of the new scourge that had come out of the east. From time to time the hoof beat of the Mongol horses passed near Aleppo, leaving destruction in their tracks. In the summer of 1244 there was fighting in the north. But the Mongols themselves did not appear then in the Holy Land.

Instead a smaller horde, fleeing before them, swam the Euphrates and galloped headlong down to the southern desert where Gaza lay. The newcomers were Kharesmians—barbaric warriors of Turkish race, only less formidable than the Mongols. They numbered more than ten thousand and they had all the cunning and endurance of the nomads who once hunted around Lake Aral. They had been driven far to the west, to the seacoast of Palestine itself and now they

looked around for new lands and spoil—as a wolf pack driven forth by a forest fire looks for fresh hunting grounds.

In their path lay Jerusalem, dismantled of its walls. To the Kharesmians the city was not different from others, and it offered loot for the taking.

Over the ruined ramparts surged the horsemen of the steppe, riding down the weak defense of the Christians who took up arms against them. So suddenly had they come up that the army of the Temple and Hospital had not time to reach the city.

No chronicler has written the story of this destruction of the city. It is said that seven thousand Christians, women and children with the men, died there. The church doors were beaten in, and the altars pillaged of their sacred vessels.

Torch in hand the Kharesmians invaded the Sepulchre, filling their saddle bags with the silver candlesticks and gold ornaments. They broke open the tombs of Godfrey and Baldwin, to search for jewels and gold. They smashed the shrines and, when they left, the Sepulchre that had been spared during generations of warfare was wrapped in flame and smoking.

As swiftly as they had come, the horde departed. But on their heels the Moslems of Cairo swarmed in, and the desecrated Jerusalem was lost to the Crusaders. The Mamluks of Cairo saw in the advent of the pagan clan a dangerous but a timely weapon. An army was sent from Egypt to join forces with the Kharesmian khan, to advance against Damascus and the lands of the Crusaders. The combined strength of the invaders amounted to 15,000 horsemen, under command of a one-eyed Mamluk—Baibars, the Panther. But the wild Kharesmian clansmen, fresh from the central Asia wars, were more formidable even than the Mamluks.

Warned of the approaching peril, Sultan Ismail of Damascus assembled his forces and appealed urgently to the Templars to make common cause with him—pointing out that if the Kharesmian horde took Damascus, the Holy Land would suffer the same fate.

So the small armies of the Temple and the Hospital—always in readiness to take the field—rode south, with the patriarch of Jerusalem and the barons of the Holy Land. They went as volunteers, for no king was there to summon them to arms, and they went with full knowledge of the odds against them—they numbered some 500 knights of the Temple, and 200 Hospitallers and a few Teutonic knights, with perhaps ten times as many men at arms of the two orders, and the liegemen of the barons. They found awaiting them under command of Al Mansur of Hamah, the Moslem cavalry of Damascus, with the army of the amir of Kerak. For the first time the black and white banner—*Beauséant*—of the Temple, and the cross of the patriarch were ranged beside the black banners of Damascus. The Crusaders had joined forces with the great-grandsons of Saladin.

By mutual consent they rode south to give battle before the Kharesmians and Mamluks could invade their lands. They descended from the hills into the dry brown plain that led to the sandy waste and the salt marshes of Gaza. And soon their scouts were in touch with the outposts of the Mamluks. A last camp, a grooming and saddling of the chargers, and a moment of prayer in the half light before dawn, and they got to horse, seeking their ranks.

The Crusaders formed on the right of the allied army. In their array, the Templars held the center, with the Hospitallers and the barons under Walter of Brienne on either side. In this order they advanced at a foot pace without sound, while the drums and cymbals of Al Mansur resounded on their left.

But it was the one-eyed Panther who struck the first blow—swift as a wolf to leap at an opening. He launched the dark mass of Kharesmian horsemen against Al Mansur, in the center of the allies. So devastating was the onset of the warriors of the steppes, who plied their bows with deadly effect as they came on

before using their heavy, curved swords—that the Damascus cavalry broke and gave way before them. And the amir of Kerak, cut off on the far flank, could hold his ground little longer.

In their first rush the Kharesmians had swept away two-thirds of the allied army, and now they advanced with the Mamluks, with a thunder of hoofs and a thrumming of kettledrums against the men of the cross. Outnumbered and nearly cut off, the Crusaders stood fast. The mailed horsemen of the Temple heard their master's horn resound. *Beauséant* was carried forward, and the knights charged with the deep throated chant—

"Lord, grant us victory—not to us, but to the glory of thy holy Name."

Closing their ranks and casting away their spears to use their swords, the others followed the familiar black and white banner into the mass of surging horses and exulting warriors that pressed about them.

For hours they fought at bay, a hopeless fight. *Beauséant* went down, not to be lifted again. Slain was the Master of the Temple. Around the lifted cross a desperate ring of men, ahorse and afoot, with broken mail and bloodied weapons fought until silence fell over the battlefield and the riders of the steppes flung themselves from the saddles to snatch spoil from the dead.

Walter of Brienne was captive, with the Master of the Hospital. From the plain of Gaza only thirty-three Templars and twenty-six Hospitallers and three Teutonic knights escaped that night, and of the nobles only the patriarch and the seigneur of Tyre got away.

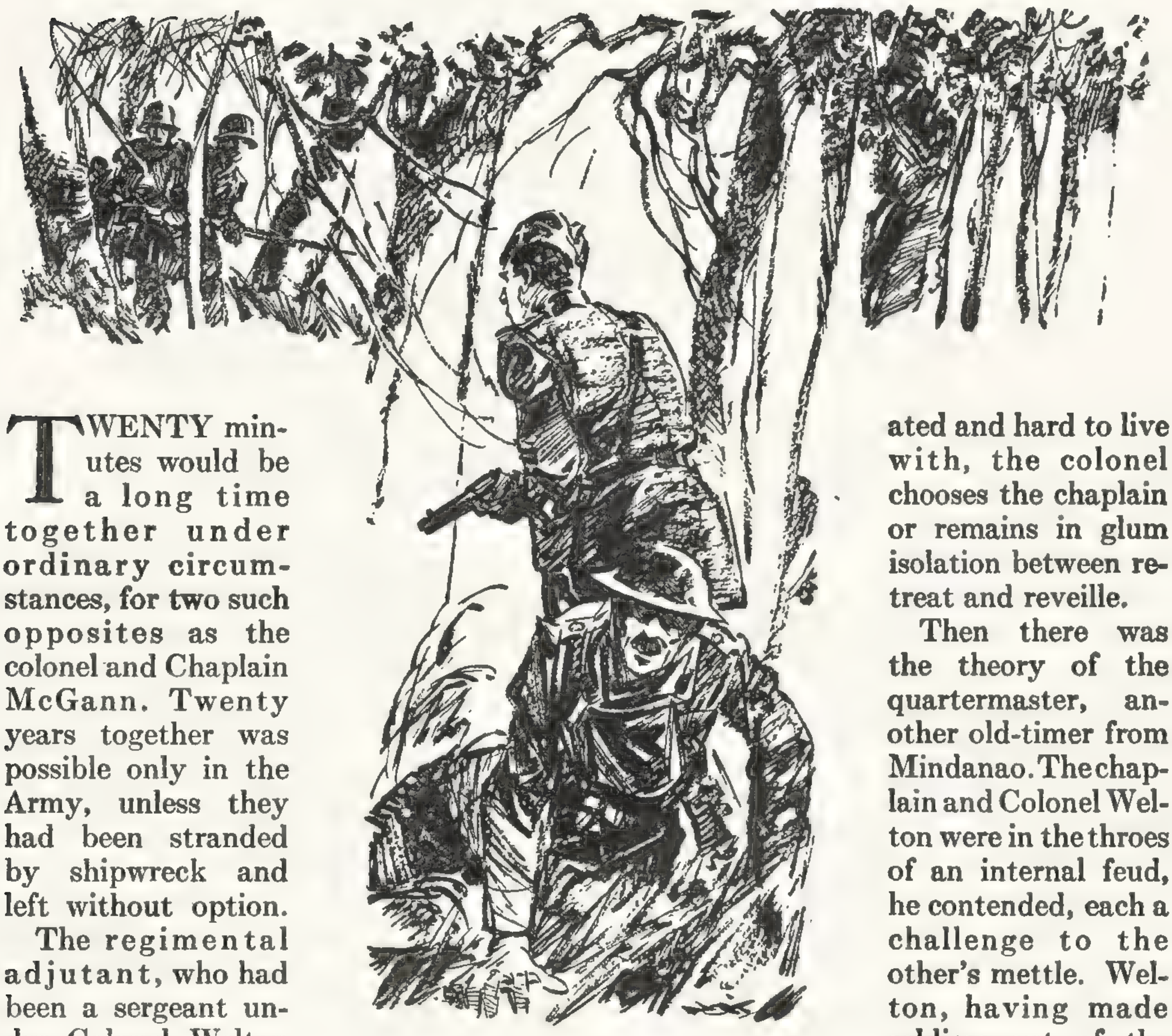
So was fought the battle of Gaza that lost Jerusalem and the south of the Holy Land beyond remedy, to the pagans from mid-Asia. The captives were driven in triumph to Cairo, with the heads of their dead companions hanging from their necks. But the Panther and his horde swept on. They ravaged Hebron, and passed through Bethlehem, darkening the streets with blood and stripping the great church of Mary of its gold and ornaments.

With the war at an end, the Kharesmians no longer held together. Scattering among the Moslem lords, they became Mamluks in their turn—soldier-slaves, serving new masters. Most of them found their way into Egypt, to serve the Mamluk general Baibars—the Panther—who had come from the Tartars of the Golden Horde bringing with him the secret of victory.

But Jerusalem lay desolate, beyond reach of the Crusaders who had lost southern Palestine. Worse, the men of the cross were no longer able to put an army in the field. The halls of the Temple and the Hospital were stripped of half their men, and the women of the castles mourned their dead.

The surviving Crusaders, with their backs to the sea, between Château Pelerin and Marghab sent appeals for aid to Europe, while they made ready to defend their castles.

DEVIL BUSTER



By ARED WHITE

TWENTY minutes would be a long time together under ordinary circumstances, for two such opposites as the colonel and Chaplain McGann. Twenty years together was possible only in the Army, unless they had been stranded by shipwreck and left without option.

The regimental adjutant, who had been a sergeant under Colonel Welton in Mindanao twenty years before, swore each time he saw the two men walk together out into the French twilight, that it was the power of lonesomeness. For, if you except the chaplain, the lonesomest man in the regiment is its colonel, notwithstanding his bustling staff, his hustling orderlies, his runners, mounts, dog-robber, and his car. Once the day's training grind is done, all flee the colonel's presence as from a pestilence, leaving him a choice for companionship between brigade general and chaplain. Generals being mostly opinionated and hard to live with, the colonel chooses the chaplain or remains in glum isolation between retreat and reveille.

Then there was the theory of the quartermaster, another old-timer from Mindanao. The chaplain and Colonel Welton were in the throes of an internal feud, he contended, each a challenge to the other's mettle. Welton, having made soldiers out of the most unpromising raw material, was bent on turning even the chaplain to his own way of thinking. And McGann, having salvaged some of the most persistent sinners in the Service, was slowly spinning his spell upon the stubborn colonel.

But, if so, twenty years together had left the two as little alike, to all outward appearances, as on the day when they reported as young lieutenants in Mindadanao. Though they walked together now every evening through the French billeting area, it was always with their

heads set straight to the front and rarely speaking; two solemn, silent men, each busy with his own thoughts but doubtless finding some strange solace in the other's mere presence.

Except for a uniform and a row of campaign ribbons, twenty years had given Chaplain McGann nothing of the setup of a soldier. His figure had gotten away from him badly at the waist, and there was a stoop to his shoulders. His face was wind burned to the color of a new field boot, but its lines were soft lines and there was always a gentle light in his large gray eyes. But there was depth to his jaw and a firmness in his fine mouth, and he carried on with a tactful but unswerving tenacity in his own little private war against the forces of which he was the duly sworn and ordained foe.

There was something more than twenty years behind Colonel Welton's bristling martial air. There must have been in his blood a dominant strain from ancient generations of fighting men, reaching back into those hectic ages when war was the whim of kings. He had but one interest, the military service; and it was his proudest boast that he had never been anything other than a soldier. In twenty years' service there had not been a day of detached duty, nor an hour on any one's staff. Always with troops, a man's life among men, Colonel Welton was fond of saying.

The colonel looked his part, a field soldier every inch, with lean, erect body, legs that bowed at the correct angle into imported willow calf boots; level gray eyes that sparkled with vitality, and a full, bronzed face that was sketched in the sharp lines of authority. He was decisive in everything he did, even in the bluster and badinage of off duty moods. He worked hard, rode hard, swore hard and, on occasion, drank hard; was considerable of a disciplinarian without being anything of a martinet; impulsive, but clear of judgment, and exacting of every one in his war strength regiment. There were those in the ranks to swear at him behind his back, and a great majority to swear by him.

Pistol marksmanship was the one visible military tie to grow up between the colonel and Chaplain McGann. Old-timers explained that this was an outgrowth of their long service together in the Philippines when they were the only bachelor officers at an isolated garrison and therefore driven to a personal alliance against the blue devils of lonesomeness. In those days a sort of unspoken agreement had sprung up, Welton attending the morning services at the Post Chapel, McGann spending the afternoon at the pistol butts burning up Government ammunition in pistol practise.

But since their arrival in France, Colonel Welton had abandoned his part of this ancient agreement, saying he was too busy shaking down thirty-six hundred recruits to spend any precious time at services. He insisted, however, on the weekly rounds at the pistol butts since the chaplain was the one man who could give him a real struggle in placing the bull's-eyes with an Army automatic. On occasions when McGann outshot him, the colonel found high glee in his own defeat.

"You can see for yourself," he would tell his staff, "that I'm making a soldier of McGann! Well, show me the man I can't make into a soldier, though Devil Buster is the toughest case I ever tackled."

ON THE LAST Sunday the regiment was to be in its French billeting area before moving up for battle, there was a driving rain at reveille. When Chaplain McGann drifted into headquarters out of the wet, a new batch of replacement officers was on hand, fresh from the depot at Montrichard, waiting to receive their once-over from Colonel Welton before getting assignment to companies. Chaplain McGann moved ahead of them and took his place in front of the colonel's desk.

At the end of several minutes, Colonel Welton looked up from his litter of papers and scowled, first at the drizzle outside, then at Chaplain McGann.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Sorry to bother the Colonel when he's so busy," said McGann, "but I wanted to remind you this is the last Sunday before we move forward, sir."

"So it is," said Welton in the cold official voice of his on-duty hours. He leaned back and lighted his pipe. "Well, what of it?"

"I thought this a proper occasion for the regiment to attend services, sir," said McGann.

"Oh, you do, eh?" Welton drawled, somewhat disagreeably. He cast a significant glance at the sloping rainfall. "I thought maybe you'd come in with a sensible suggestion, McGann, that we sound recall instead of church call this morning. That would make a great hit with everybody, including me."

"Not when it's the last Sunday before battle," said McGann resolutely, "I would like to see a large turnout for services, since it is the last services many of these lads will ever attend."

"Well, go ahead," said Welton sharply. "Why tell me your troubles? Church is optional, isn't it? Or do you want me to order the men to church?"

"Of course not, sir. I only wanted to ask that you have the buglers sound 'overcoats' with church call."

"That's it, is it? All right, I'll cooperate, although I don't see any sense in it. The men have brains enough to wear raincoats without being told and, furthermore, they've got sense enough to stay in out of the wet today while they've got a chance."

"Thank you very much, Colonel Welton," McGann said in a crisp, official voice. "I know that will help bring out a few men. Good morning, sir!"

The chaplain saluted, turned on his heel and strode to the door. Colonel Welton blew an explosive cloud of smoke into the air, twisted in his chair and bellowed after the chaplain. As McGann returned, a look of mild inquiry on his face, the colonel confronted him with accusing eyes.

"McGann, I haven't served with you all these years without knowing you've got something on your mind besides what you've let drop. Now out with it. What you aiming at?"

"I have no wish to pester the Colonel with my troubles, sir."

"Troubles—what troubles? Out with it. I've got something to do besides fence with you."

"I've been uneasy for fear that there wouldn't be much of any one out for services this morning, Colonel. Most of the captains tell me the men want to stay in their billets today."

"Of course they do. Who wouldn't? So you've been trying to get the captains to order the men out, eh?"

"Naturally, sir, I've been doing everything possible to get the men out this morning. It seems the right thing for them to do, in spite of the rain. If the captains would show a better attitude of cooperation—"

"Yes, order their men out to get their soles soaked while you work on their souls, eh?" Welton clucked to himself at this fling. "Well, it happens that the captains aren't running this regiment, and as long as church service is optional, I'd take the hide off any captain that ordered his men to church. Now you get out and attend to your business, and I'll attend to mine. Good morning, sir!"

There was a fleeting light, an inscrutable sparkle in McGann's gray eyes as he drew himself erect, saluted, and disappeared out into the rain soaked street. The replacement officers saw him into the distance with sagging jaws. The jolt had left them cold and clammy. So this was the kind of outfit they had landed in? The colonel a first class martinet, who even razzed the chaplain! Their fears were written in their faces. One of them cautiously buttonholed a passing staff officer.

"Say, Captain," he inquired in a guarded whisper, "what sort of an outfit is this, anyway?"

"Why?" demanded the staff officer.

"I was just wondering," said the replacement. "I'm not claiming to be strong on psalms myself, but it did sound to me

like that devil buster didn't get a very good break from the C. O."

"He didn't, eh?" There was a sneer in the staff officer's voice. "Say, do you ever go to church?"

"Well, no; not me. But those that want to ought—"

"You're right," cut in the other. "Those that want to ought. But whether you want to or not, you're going to service this morning. So am I. We're all going. After you've been around these parts as long as I have you'll know the symptoms when you see them. And don't ever waste any sympathy on that chaplain!"

The voice of Colonel Welton, calling for his adjutant, boomed through the headquarters. The adjutant responded with alacrity.

"Captain, get the battalion commanders on the telephone at once," he commanded in his quick, staccato voice. "Remind them that Chaplain McGann is holding services in the public square this morning at eight, regardless of weather. You might mention the fact casually that this is the last service before we move forward."

Colonel Welton paused to light his black pipe. When he spoke again his voice was a slow, insinuating drawl.

"Tell them, Captain, that while attendance at Chaplain McGann's services is optional, at the same time their regimental commander would be highly pleased to see the companies present at full strength—of course if that is entirely convenient. Understand me, Captain, eh?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"And these replacements here—" he jerked his thumb toward the huddle of grim faced new arrivals—"you may instruct them not to wait any longer. It's barely possible some of them would like to attend the services, and since the chaplain makes a point of wanting as many as possible this morning, I'll not stand in the way."

"Yes, sir; I'll show them the way. A question—is the Colonel postponing his eight o'clock conference with the battalion commanders?"

"Er—yes. See here, Captain; did you ever know me to neglect my own obligations to the men?" He asked this with a wry face and waited for no answer. "You know how I feel about all this stuff, but I reckon attending services is one of the penalties of commanding a regiment. Got to set an example once in awhile. I can't figure the reason for it, but when a lot of fool soldiers see their colonel taking punishment along with them, it doesn't seem to hurt them half so much."

AT EIGHT o'clock, the hour of the Sunday services, the companies marched to the square in front of the Hôtel-de-Ville in column of squads and massed in close formation about a five-ton Army truck that Chaplain McGann used for pulpit. The colonel was there a few minutes ahead of time, his eyes searching the strength of companies as they swung into their places. As M Company of the Third Battalion took position, his scowl centered upon a thin place in the ranks and he sent a staff officer scurrying for the company commander.

"M Company looks a bit short this morning, Captain," he charged when the commander reported.

"All present but twelve men, sir," announced the captain stoutly.

"Twelve, eh? What happened to the twelve?"

"They wanted to stay in billets, sir, account of bad weather. We understood the service was optional."

"Optional, eh? Did your major say that I would be very much pleased to see your company at services this morning, Captain?"

"Yes, sir. But I thought—"

"Did you ever learn that an expressed wish from your commander is the equivalent of a command?"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"And wouldn't you think I'd much rather have stayed in myself out of the wet this morning, Captain?"

The captain of M Company stammered an uneasy and puzzled assent.

"Right after these services, Captain," Colonel Welton ordered, "you will report with your twelve apostles to headquarters. The operations officer will show you where I want a special pistol butt dug—make it ten feet long, three feet wide and five feet deep. That's all!"

Chaplain McGann mounted his improvised pulpit and stood with folded arms beside a flag draped ammunition box upon which reposed his Bible. There was a sparkle in his eyes as he saw his congregation assemble, the largest since they had come into the billeting area where attendance was optional. Thirty-six hundred men, less twelve—a congregation to brighten the eyes of any parson. Men in their teens, mostly, or barely into their twenties, who rose each day ahead of the light to gulp heavy, muscle building rations and toil until the sun was down. Days spent in running, leaping barriers, lunging fiercely with bayoneted rifles; in hurling themselves to the ground, rising, running on; marching long kilometers in masses, breaking into sudden skirmish lines, back into columns; goaded by feverish, bristling men who swore and raged at those who lagged. Doing these things over and over, week in and out, so that such things would get to be a fixed habit of mind and body against the day of test when the conscious mind might refuse to guide them through a roaring hell.

At the end of each racking day, a few minutes' relaxation in billets before they turned to sleep. A day on pass now and then. *Vin blanc, vin rouge,* cognac, galloping dominoes, mademoiselles, the easy customs of the villages. And the chaplain's job to remind them, when he could catch their ears, of the narrow path.

The congregation stood at ease under dripping steel helmets, listening grim faced and stolid to the band play "Onward Christian Soldiers". Then, as Chaplain McGann raised his hand for silence, they clapped their heels together as one man and lowered their heads while the chaplain opened the services.

Colonel Welton stood through the prayer with his head bowed. But his eyes were not on the ground in humility. They were boring upward at a sharp angle through his thick, sandy eyebrows, swinging restlessly back and forth along the ranks. They rested for an instant upon an impious doughboy who chose this moment to bite into a plug of tobacco. They caught the irreverant antics of a youth toying with dice, of two soldiers matching francs on the backs of their wet hands.

The band played another anthem. A cornet soloist with a nimble tongue performed. Then Chaplain McGann launched into his sermon, a trifle uncertain at first, but gaining momentum and fire swiftly until his voice rang out above the beating of rain on steel. His face glowed with animation, his body began to vibrate with a fervid energy as he drove home his weekly message of the narrow trail. The men lost their listlessness. Men forgot to shift from one leg to another and stood spellbound under the stirring magic of McGann's sermon. A tear glistened here and there in the eye of some homesick lad. And before the spell was broken, McGann ended his sermon, signaled for the band to march the regiment away, and stood with arms folded observing the break-up with glowing face.

"Some old chestnuts, Chappy," commented Colonel Welton, as McGann folded his flag, wrapped his Bible in a poncho and climbed down from the truck. "You pulled most of that stuff at least eight times I can remember of down in Zamboanga. But you are improving as a spellbinder."

"Thank you for the compliment." McCann smiled. "A congregation the size of that puts a man on his mettle, sir."

"Eh, yes." Colonel Welton scowled. "Was something of a surprise to me the way they turned out today. I didn't expect you'd have two squads. Must be the rain made them lonesome—nothing else to do but go to church."

He turned to his adjutant in abrupt dismissal of Chaplain McGann, who faded at once into the village.

"Captain," he directed, "make that pistol butt twenty feet long and have it ready by two o'clock. I've got four men more for the digging detail; Private Levinsky of D Company, Corporal Murphey of H and the first two men in the third set of fours, first rank of L Company. Whispering during services. Now get the glad news to them."

ON THE SOGGY October night that the regiment lay under the jump-off line waiting for dawn to plunge them into their baptism of fire, Chaplain McGann entered Welton's P. C., long after midnight. His eyes were deeply ringed in blue, his cheeks sallow, his face drawn and haggard; yet he seemed strangely composed under the bellowing of the artillery preparation overhead. Colonel Welton, battle arrangements completed and waiting only for the infantry zero hour, motioned McGann to an improvised chair in front of him.

"Scared, Chappy?" he demanded presently.

"Have been—yes, sir," replied McGann evenly. "Feeling better, now."

"Same here," said Welton. "Fact is, found my legs shaking pretty bad awhile ago when that artillery first started coughing."

"Can't boast that my own legs have felt any too solid." Chaplain McGann smiled.

Colonel Welton reached for his musette bag, took out a thin metal flask and tendered it to the chaplain.

"This helped mine, McGann. Better take a nip for your nerves. The worst is yet to come."

"Thanks, Colonel. But my nerves are all right now. I'll have no trouble."

"Prayers, eh? Well, every man for his favorite stiffening, McGann. Though for the life of me, I know of no reason why I should fret. Nobody left behind, if I get hit, except a niece. I can just picture that dolly swooning of grief when she collects ten thousand war risk from my old carcass, can't you?"

Chaplain McGann blinked thoughtfully at the colonel.

"It would be mighty lonesome for me around this P. C," he said somberly, "if anything happened to the Colonel."

"Hadn't thought of that, Chappy." Welton studied the floor of the dugout briefly and crossed his legs. "You and me —that's about all there is left of the old crew, isn't it? The rest of them's either dead or married, eh?"

"That's the way of it, sir."

"Well, cheer up!" Colonel Welton's face lighted up as he threw off his moment's lapse. "The mortality rate among colonels is damn low—disgusting low, as the lieutenant-colonels put it. But here, McGann! What you doing up here, anyhow? Why aren't you back with the second *echelon* where you belong! You better not get poking around or some Christian Boche will bore a hole through you."

"I've been out among my men, sir," said McGann. "I feel my duty is among them; their dangers are my dangers."

"Damned nonsense, McGann! Your duty is to stay under cover. But I know well enough if you've got such a fool notion in your head, there's no use debating it with you. At least you might let me slip you an automatic in case of a close pinch."

McGann smiled and shook his head.

"The Colonel knows a chaplain isn't supposed to go armed."

"Not, eh?" Welton squirmed in his seat at the thought. "Well, in this kind of a rumpus you might hide one about you for emergency. You've burned up enough good Government ammunition in your day that a gun would be some use to you if you had to use one."

"That's not my job, sir." McGann smiled again, whimsically, and added, "It'd be like asking the Colonel to do the praying, don't you think?"

Colonel Welton snorted.

"Well, let's not think of anything so utterly absurd as that, Chappy. Now you get right on back there where you belong and remember I order you not to

take any silly chances of getting yourself killed."

In the red week that followed there was no such thing as lonesomeness in the regiment. Every ounce of Colonel Welton's strength went into the desperate drive of men and steel that was forcing a final wedge into the vital German artery behind Sedan. Chaplain McGann, unarmed and carrying with him his tiny service testament, followed close behind the assault waves, cheering the living by word and example, taking last messages from mortally wounded, holding a simple service over the dead. The red maelstrom of battle did not draw him into its violence. Other chaplains of combat regiments, goaded by the fury of attack and counter attack, might rush forward to help with rifle or pistol, but McGann clung to his calling. Once he helped cart rations to a half famished strong point. Incessantly he helped direct the evacuation of wounded. Across his shoulders at times were slung a dozen filled canteens. But not once did he level a fallen rifle.

The Boche was driven finally back across the Meuse, headed pell-mell into Belgium and fighting loose rear guard actions with patrols and machine gun nests to keep the Americans off his main bodies. Regimental command posts had to be moved every few hours in order to keep abreast of the pursuit.

Colonel Welton was going forward to the Meuse, intent on crossing that river, reconnoitering his advanced strong points, and selecting a point for his advance P. C. His car was moving at high speed toward Dun-sur-Meuse when it flashed past Chaplain McGann, muddy, disheveled, forlorn, trudging forward on the road. The colonel's car screeched to a quick stop and backed up.

"I hear you've been running around hog wild taking reckless chances, Chaplain McGann!" bellowed the colonel.

"Only doing my duty, sir," said McGann.

"All right. The worst is over," said Welton. "If you're going to flirt with death, just as well travel with me. That'll be some safer. Besides, I'm going to move the P. C. across the river to Mailly, and you'll be running your legs off trying to keep up. Climb in!"

THE BRIDGE was out when they reached Dun-sur-Meuse. German demolitions had left only some twisted wreckage, but upon this the advancing doughboys had strung wreckage and gotten across without wading the chilly river. But there was no route for a car until the engineers could throw a traffic bridge across, upon which they were already at work.

The operations officer got out to interview the engineers while Colonel Welton consulted his map, and measured the distance to Mailly where one of his battalions had established a strong point.

"Engineers'll have their bridge across in two hours, sir," reported the staff officer. "They say there's no bridges down the river."

"Out and walk, then!" said Welton decisively, suiting action to word. "Mailly's only three kilometers from here. Driver, you bring the car on to Mailly and find us as soon as you get across."

A battalion had set up its command post in the shell racked village of Dun-sur-Meuse. Colonel Welton paused here to check over the sector with his battalion commander.

"Two of our companies are holding Mailly, sir," reported the major. "The enemy continues to give ground, but we're holding our objectives and are busy mopping up and consolidating."

"I'm going to put my command post far enough ahead this time, Major, that I'll not have to be moving it every ten minutes. If any messages come here for me, send them on to Mailly!"

"But, sir," cautioned the major as Colonel Welton started out of the roofless house that held battalion headquarters, "I'd like to advise against the Colonel going there at present. There seems to be a gap between the 5th and 90th Divisions out there, and until it is closed, there's

danger of enemy patrols. That will only be a couple of hours."

"Mailly, I said, Major!" Colonel Welton snapped. "If there are any messages, send them there. I'm directing an advance, not conducting a Cook's tour of the battlefields!"

He passed through the village at a swinging stride, the staff trailing him, Chaplain McGann following along just short of a dog trot in order to keep pace. Besides three staff officers and the chaplain, Welton took with him a corporal and three riflemen, fresh runners for emergency use. On leaving the village they headed into a soggy clay road that twisted through the drab countryside, over gently rolling, brush littered terrain toward Mailly.

A kilometer and a half out of Dun-sur-Meuse a trail appeared in the dead grass, paralleling the road and offering a better footing. Into this the colonel plunged, and a few minutes later entered a scraggly thicket. As they emerged from this there was a sudden sharp outcry from one of the runners.

"Boche!" he cried. "There on our right. Look out!"

"Down!" shouted some one.

There was a shallow declivity just ahead. Into this Colonel Welton ran before throwing himself on his face to avoid the scattering fire that was already being pumped over by the Germans. The others had dived on to their faces at the first alarm. Quickly recovering from the first shock of the alarm, they crawled on their stomachs into the protection of the draw.

A reconnaissance over the rim of the hole failed to develop the enemy. But the runner who had discovered them estimated fifteen in command of an officer. A browsing patrol, evidently, that had stumbled upon the colonel's party.

"They're crawling in on us, sir!" shouted a runner whose eyes had been glued cautiously to the front.

The colonel peered over again, only to have mud thrown in his face by the angry snap of a Mauser bullet. Welton turned on his back and gave tense orders.

"Get into action, you men with rifles. You officers use your pistols. We've got to hold them off!"

He set the example by bringing his own pistol into play, putting a shot out into the grass at every movement that caught his eye. The Germans, at meeting stubborn resistance, adopted a simple plan. They divided their forces, part firing from the flanks to beat down the American resistance while others wriggled forward to the grapple. It was only by rolling from place to place to avoid being spotted by the German snipers that Colonel Welton's headquarters group was able to save itself from prompt capture or obliteration. But the Germans held the advantage, knew their business and their terrain, and kept tenaciously to their purpose.

"Great Caesar!" cried Welton, after twice emptying his pistol, "think of the humiliation of it! Captured! I'll die fighting before I'll have it said the Boche captured my headquarters." He turned to Chaplain McGann, who was hugging the ground close beside him. "Here, McGann," he said, extending his own automatic, "here's where you pay for all the good ammunition you've burned. Try some of your shooting miracles on that nest before they land us!"

Chaplain McGann lay without moving, staring eyes looking out of drawn face at the proffered weapon. But he made no move to take it.

"Ten thousand years in hell would be sweet to me alongside the disgrace of capture!" raged Welton. "Twenty years a soldier and—"

WHEN Chaplain McGann merely stared at the weapon, Welton turned back with an oath and, raising on one elbow, resumed firing. A minute later he half rose with a curse, seemed to slip in the grass, and plunged forward on his face. McGann quickened to animation, regardless of the spiteful hissings overhead. He turned Welton over and saw with stark

horror a crimson gash across the top of the colonel's head. Colonel Welton lay blinking at the sky, his face a puzzled grimace as one who tries to orient himself to unfamiliar surroundings.

"They got me, Chappy," he muttered as recognition of McGann returned. He started violently as the danger flashed into his mind. "My God—me a Boche prisoner—!"

The muscles of McGann's face tightened, a swift fire kindled in his gray eyes as they left his fallen commander and centered upon the pistol that lay in the grass beside Welton's hand. McGann's movements were deliberate as he grasped the weapon, reloaded the empty clip and thrust it into the butt. Before any one sensed his purpose, McGann had leaped to his feet, snatched the chaplain's insignia from his collar and was moving forward into the open, couched low, the pistol at the ready in front of him.

From the dangerous position on his feet, he sighted the crawling figures in the dank grass, not forty yards away. He opened fire with a cool, disconcerting deliberation, moving forward to the attack as he fired.

"Down! Down on your face!" the others bellowed after him.

McGann paid no attention to the warnings—if he heard them. At his first shot, a German grenadier thrashed about in the grass. The second shot found a target and the third. He advanced, a foot or two at a time, firing at each pause with his uncanny markmanship. His own detachment, unwilling to follow him in his desperate folly, covered his flanks with fire as fast as they could work their bolts.

A minute was the length of it—one of those minutes that ticks on endlessly. When the lone figure in American uniform who stalked ruthlessly upon them, sending red vengeance with every biting flash of his pistol, failed to fall before their own fire, the German survivors suddenly arose of one accord and bolted to the rear, zigzagging crazily. McGann, after tugging at the trigger of his emptied automatic, threw the weapon impotently after the last of the sprinting figures.

For a moment he looked after them as they scurried to shelter, then turned back, sagged, rallied with an effort, and stood looking. He was stone white, uncertain on his legs, groping. Colonel Welton, wiping blood from his eyes, climbed to his feet, waved aside the adjutant who was binding up his scalp wound and rushed forward.

"Chappy, you did it, you rascal!" Welton exulted explosively. "You did it. You paid for all the ammunition this time—and you're going to wear a new kind of a cross now, you old devil buster—a D.S. Cross. Twenty years I've known this was in your blood, and—"

McGann swayed dizzily. He sank slowly to the ground and turned on his back, his hands clutching at his breast.

"Chappy, what is it, Chappy!" cried Welton.

"I'm hurt," groaned McGann.

With a dash of his hand, Colonel Welton tore away the tangle of first aid gauze that half covered his eyes and dropped down beside the fallen chaplain. McGann's face was the color of slate and his eyes were rolling. Welton cut away the wounded man's shirt and gasped. Not one wound, but three; one through the upper chest, two in the fleshy part of his shoulder.

"Here, more first aid packs!" Welton thundered at his staff. "Get those runners to Dun-sur-Meuse for an ambulance!" He turned back to McGann. "Hold tight, Chappy," he pleaded. "They're ugly ones, but you can beat the game if you fight. There'll be a medico and an ambulance here in a jiffy. Chappy, look here at me—don't you know who it is? Here, Chappy, a swallow of this!"

He pressed his metal brandy flash to McGann's lips and forced a swallow past the chaplain's lips. The wounded man choked violently as the brandy passed his throat. He closed his lips and shook his head faintly.

"Another swallow, Chappy! It'll warm

your blood—give you strength until the medico gets here from Dun."

McGann smiled faintly and turned his head away. Then his eyes closed and his mouth became a twisted purple line as he writhed in a spasm of pain. Colonel Welton leaned close, his windburned face convulsed in sympathetic agony.

"Hold tight, Chappy, hold tight, I tell you!" he cried fearfully. "You can't go like this and leave me. You mustn't Chappy. You—"

Welton broke off and drew back from McGann, a sudden strange fire in his eyes. Slowly he mustered himself as decision crystallized in his mind. Whatever Welton did he did decisively. Having been struck by a decision he carried it out with no half measure. Impulsively he cast his clasped hands heavenward, and though his voice had something the tone of a man shouting orders to some one overhead, there was vibrant intensity in his plea for the life of his friend, and his words were strangely reminiscent of Chaplain McGann's last Sunday service. McGann's eyes opened and, as understanding came to his tortured brain, the spasm spent itself. A sparkle rose in the depths of his eyes, his labored breathing grew easier; there was a shadow of a smile on his lips as the light faded.

McGann's face was composed and his pulse steadier when the light returned. The ambulance had come from Dun-sur-Meuse, a surgeon had placed first aid bandages. Colonel Welton sat on the ground beside the wounded man, his face in a fever of anxiety.

"It's me, Chappy," he said. "See, the doctor is here and he says you'll pull through, if you'll only try hard enough. Here, a swallow of brandy will warm you —that last swallow did wonders."

The chaplain managed to shake his head. A smile crept over his face, purpose came into his eyes. He groped weakly for Welton's hand.

"Don't worry, old friend," he whispered. "I'm all right now. I'll pull through." He paused a long moment for strength. "Twenty years—but I knew it was somewhere in your heart all the time!"

WHEN WHALERS GO ASHORE

By KNUD ANDERSEN

Come pass the bottle with a song,
A jolly song,
A rousing song.
Come pass the bottle with a song,
For it's cold, and watches are long.

Oh, the world may go hang and the constable squawk!
We stay where we are, let the full glasses talk.
Our fists to the Old Man and Satan himself,
As long as there's still a good drink on the shelf.
As long as we've still got the dust,
And as long as we get it on trust—
Here's how!

Concluding

KING *of the* WORLD

By TALBOT MUNDY

I, MAJOR ROBERT CROSBY, was with Grim and Ramsden the morning the French cruiser was blown up in Marseilles harbor, and heard Meldrum Strange, that eccentric billionaire whose world-wide interests kept him eternally sniffing out the wherefores of things, name the man who was plotting against the civilization of the world.

"That explosion, Grim, is Dorje's work. His first move to conquer the world by his diabolical inventions! Track him down and exterminate him—it's your job and I won't take no for an answer!"

Both Grim—better known as Jimgrim in the places of earth where there's action—and Jeff Ramsden, his volcanic companion, had fought in many a seemingly hopeless cause before—and won; and no sooner did they take the case than an attempt was made on Grim's life by an Arab sailor. And then a woman called the Princess Baltis—an agent of Dorje—attached herself to us. From her Grim learned that Dorje was believed to be somewhere in the East; forthwith we struck

directly for Cairo—where we were joined by comrades in past adventures; Chullunder Ghose, an elephantine *babu*, whose mental equipment was second only to that of Grim; and Colonel McGowan of the British army.

In a few days Cairo was in a ferment of terror, with cables flashing in from all over the world reporting the sinking of ships, the explosion of arsenals and destruction of food supplies, and Grim struck fast at Dorje.

Going one night to the Great Pyramid of Gizeh, we discovered it to be a rendezvous for Dorje's cutthroat agents—an armed trap. But with Jeff swinging into action like a tank corps, and aided by the lucky find of a supply of Dorje's deadly gas known as "death's breath," we cleaned that rat's nest out in short order. The leader of the gang, one Bertolini, broke badly then and, as he was about to divulge the key to Dorje's cipher, Baltis murdered him with some quick, concentrated poison. Grim then decided to lure Dorje into the open—with Baltis as bait.

Sending her to Delhi in a French plane on the chance that she would contact Dorje, Grim arranged to get there well ahead of her.

In Delhi, Grim went directly to the store of wise old Benjamin, from whose dim shop all adventure trails led in that part of the world.

"Benjamin," said he, "were Dorje to come to Delhi, where would he go?"

"Hey-yeh, Jimgrim, that one is death—and who knows where death lights? Perhaps to Vasantasena, who they say is the cleverest courtesan in Delhi!"

So Grim's boldest stroke took us to Vasantasena's; he in the garb of a Ringding Gelong Lama—and announcing himself as the Lord Dorje, King of the World! That turned the trick. The curtains on a little balcony above our heads swayed sluggishly and a man, so terrible in the implacable strength that radiated coldly from him that our hearts were actually chilled, stepped forth.

"Who are you?" asked Grim.

"I *was* Dorje!" came the answer. Then, "Jimgrim, I have need of a man like you. You shall be my lieutenant! . . ."

Helpless to interfere, we were forced to stand by and see Grim led away by armed men; and a moment later we saw from the windows a ghostly, cigar shaped thing of a machine, without either wings or propeller, suddenly surge upward from the bushes of Vasantasena's garden—and Grim and Dorje were lost in the sky.

Jeff took charge. We returned to old Benjamin.

"Dorje is off over the Roof of the World," said the old man. "In Tibet northwest of Koko-nor, to a sacred place this side of Katmandu . . ."

Between them Jeff and Chullunder Ghose forced Baltis to persuade Henri de la Fontaine Coq—the French pilot who had brought her to Delhi—to follow the strange ship that bore Grim off. She agreed unwillingly; and once in the air Jeff produced a Colt automatic, scribbling a note which he handed Baltis:

> One trick, even one mistake, and I will shoot you. This is a promise.

JEFF keeps his promises, as she was perfectly aware. She kept the map on her knees and conned the distant landmarks after that.

Jeff and I were worrying about the prospect of pursuit. There was no fear of our being followed from Delhi; we had too much start at too high a speed. But nothing would be easier than for phone or telegraph to send on word ahead of us. We could ignore all planes already in the air, since those would have no excuse to suspect us of lawless flight; but planes on the ground could be sent up to force us down, so we scanned the horizon nervously.

As a matter of fact, the only plane that did come near us was a Royal Air Force unit on patrol; but it was slower than we were by twenty or thirty per cent. and its pilot, though he tried hard, had no time to gain sufficient altitude. We passed directly over him, and though he followed for a while and appeared to be trying to signal to us, he was soon outdistanced.

I doubt whether he could see how many passengers we had, although it was impossible for us to duck down in the crowded cockpit.

I suppose I never will get used to the speed with which the leagues trail out beneath and behind an airplane. I am a natural born biped, fond of hoofing it leisurely and not air minded. Trains seem fast enough, and the Woolworth Building high enough. I discover myself almost scandalized by a speed of a hundred miles an hour. A hundred and twenty —a hundred and forty miles an hour removes me from the realm of reason and I simply don't believe my senses.

When I saw the Bramaputra River, which is the Tsang-po slightly civilized, and Darjiling, and the Mountains of Nepal, there was no mistaking them and yet they were no more genuine, to my mind, than remembered dreams. That journey, even now, seems unreal, and it was rendered more so by the Frenchman's perfectly sublime indifference to consequences.

He undoubtedly believed he was acquiring information, or about to do so, useful to his government; and he probably knew as well as any other taker of such chances that at least ninety per cent. of the risks run and the ingenuity expended by the secret services is as useless as tea at a cocktail party.

But air mindedness and normal prudence seem imcompatible. A genuine airman, who is as scarce as a genuine poet, views life relatively to a brand new set of values. He belongs, I believe, to a new race; and he has the apparent youthful irresponsibility of all things young—an irresponsibility to standards that an aging race considers sacred because it seeks to justify its inhibitions.

Baltis might be also of that new race. She was at least equally contemptuous of custom and the etiquette of nations. She and he hit it off famously. They seemed to understand each other without speech, almost without gesture. She appeared to me to acquire a new self-confidence during that swift journey, as if Henri de la Fontaine Coq were a magician who had conjured forth, by mere proximity, her hidden value.

He appeared to trust her absolutely, which was rather disconcerting to us passengers, because it was she who compared the landscape with the map, she who guided us above the winding valleys of Nepal between enormous mountains. No reason appealed to me why she should sit there with our lives in her hands. But there was nothing to be done about it.

It was she who first discerned the mass of palaces and temples that is Katmandu. From a height in the air it looks like a patternless jumble of fantastic toys that some one played with and forgot; and the enormous snow topped mountains heaped on one another to the northward look like foaming waves about to burst and overwhelm the place.

We flew lower, much lower, I suppose because she and he desired to look at the forbidden city. We could presently see crowds of people, some of whom were evidently soldiers, and we had some faint idea of the excitement we were causing. Most of them had certainly seen planes before; but there is not one native of Nepal who does not know that theirs is forbidden territory.

We were signaled, with flags. When we ignored that, we were fired at. A whole company of troops was marched on to a level space that looked like a drill ground and fired three volleys at us, but the bullets came nowhere near. Then we saw them dragging out some kind of cannon, but before they could bring that into action we had circled the city and were heading away northward.

There was a pass that Baltis seemed to recognize, although she shrugged her shoulders at the map now. It looked barely negotiable by men on foot and quite impossible for horses; here and there were ascents as steep as the face of the New Jersey Palisades, and where the slopes were less terrific we could see the deep grooves cut by avalanching rocks and snow.

And now the wind became a problem.

It began to blow in sudden, ice shod squalls that made our course a swerving zigzag. The plane bumped and swayed like a small boat on an open sea with wind against tide. The roar of the exhaust seemed somehow lacking in assurance, as if the stream of sound was slightly interrupted at its source. Henri de la Fontaine Coq began to finger the controls and to watch the gages so intently that there could be no doubt there was something wrong with the engine.

AND we needed that engine's full power. Time and again a sharp squall almost wrecked us against crags where rescue, if we should by miracle survive the crash, was too improbable for even drunkards to imagine. Coq kept trying to climb higher, but the engine refused to exert the needed power and several times it stuttered ominously. Straight ahead of us, the summit of the pass—a mere notch between sawtooth crags swept clean of snow by shrieking wind—seemed actually higher than ourselves; and to turn and go back was impossible in that wind, with mountain walls on either hand.

It looked, with that failing engine, as if the luckiest conceivable journey's end would be a snatched forced landing on the hundred yards of rock—it looked smooth—in the throat of that screaming gap, through which the wind came pouring like winter water through a broken dam.

I don't know how Coq managed it. I know I thought that we were blowing over backward, then believed we were in a tailspin. One terrific bump convinced me, for a fragment of eternity that is not measurable in degrees of time, that we had struck the rock on the summit. Then we worried our way forward with the motion of an artificial minnow being reeled in on a casting line. There were three upward swerves like the swoop of a car on a Coney Island scenic railroad, followed by a sudden, sickening descent that changed into a long, untroubled gliding motion like the leisurely roll of the water that forever comes tumbling over the Horseshoe Falls at Niagara.

The engine stopped. Rocks, sides of mountains and then trees sped past us far too swiftly for the eye to measure them. We were coasting, not more than a hundred feet, I think, above the steep northern slope of the mountain. It was almost like a runway underneath us, with walls on each side that prevented our turning. Down that chute we slid, with crags and treetops underneath us merging until they seemed as smooth as the top of a billiard table—until at last there was room to maneuver and Coq went into a wide, slow spiral like a vulture's, seeking a place to land.

We were above a valley that had no apparent outlet. There was a lake near the eastern end of it, two small villages of stone built huts, some forest, a wide clearing, then another forest. In the midst of the clearing, buildings in a semicircle. Nowhere but in the clearing was the landing even moderately safe, because where there were no trees there were boulders or else the ground was so rough that a crash would be unavoidable. Coq headed for the clearing, spiraling downward, using great skill that was, nevertheless, not comparable with his resolute negotiation of the summit. I believe he was tired. Or perhaps like all the rest of us he needed sleep.

At any rate, a squall of icy wind came screaming through a gap between two northern peaks and caught us beam on. We slipped sidewise, almost turned over, then nose dived. Coq came out of that, I don't know how, but struck a treetop on the eastern edge of the clearing. It damaged our right wing. Then he crashed into the trees to save us from being dashed to pieces on the ground and something struck me on the forehead, so that I don't know just what happened during the next few minutes.

That, however, is the inside story of the mystery, that seems so to have puzzled newspaper readers the wide world over, of how that record breaking plane was found within forbidden territory with its aviator missing and no clue as to why it came there.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"Kill Baltis if you wish."

I RECOVERED consciousness with Baltis leaning over me. She was kneeling. I knew she had gone through my pockets. Not that it mattered; there was nothing there of any interest except my small emergency kit, some money and identification papers.

"I think you die," she said. "I think you shall be Henri de la Fontaine Coq."

I understood her, as one understands things in a dream. I didn't even remember where I was, or what had happened, but I understood, nevertheless, that she proposed to leave my body lying there with Coq's papers, and that he should escape with mine. Above her I could see the sky through branches, and I knew I was wedged uncomfortably in some undergrowth.

"A pity I must not shoot you," she remarked, "but it would make a noise. Nevaire mind. It shall be almost painless."

With a lancet from my pocket case of instruments, she slashed at my forearm to sever an artery. But she made her incision in the wrong place, and the pain revived me. I sat up and hurled her backward into the tangled undergrowth. When she tried to get up I shoved her back again. It was not until then that I remembered everything and saw the smashed plane, fifty feet away, nose downward, jammed between two tree trunks. I had to look upward to see it. I had been thrown into a depression between rounded boulders. My head ached.

"You are a fool," I told her.

"Yes—" said a voice behind me.

I turned slowly, because if a man has the drop on you it is the silliest thing in the world to give him an excuse to pull the trigger. Dorje stood there, on the nearest boulder. He did not look human. He looked like a devil from a Tibetan picture. I felt for my automatic, but Baltis had thrown it away.

"She hash sjust that much shence," he remarked.

He seemed unable to pronounce the letter S. The effect was disgusting. It is mainly little things like that which cause mayhem and murder. Big things are too big for us to get angry about.

"Kill Baltish, if you wish," said Dorje.

Baltis made the curious mistake of thinking that I spared her life for gentlemanly reasons, or perhaps because I wished to buy her gratitude. The truth is, I was intellectually frozen with hatred. Baltis was no concern of mine—none whatever. Dorje was a monopolizing obsession.

"He is a doctor. He saves people. He does not kill them," Baltis remarked—childishly, I thought.

Dorje laughed outright, one humorless, cynical sneer.

"Then you are ash big a fool as she ish. To grow corn, it ish neshesshary to kill weeds and inshects."

Reason returned slowly. I could feel it almost like a physical reaction. The obvious thing to do was to kill Dorje with my hands before he could have a chance to summon help. I took a step toward him. But I had to climb that boulder; and as I started to do that two faces peered above it, one on either side of Dorje's legs. They were as devilish as his, but stupid. His seemed all intellect. I picked up my case of instruments and put a plug on my forearm to stop the bleeding, bound that with my handkerchief and held it out for Baltis to tie the knot.

"What next?" I demanded.

"Thish way."

The two owners of the faces followed him, mongrel Mongols clothed in dyed leather—lean, muscular rogues whose tread suggested secret purposes and confidence. They had knives in their belts, but no firearms that I could detect. Then Baltis took me by the hand.

"We are fr-r-riends now, yes?"

"*Tu m'embêtes!*" I answered, paying her in her own coin, with interest.

"*Pourquoi?* You and I are destined to be useful to each other. Othairwise I

could have keeled you. Therefore you should do as I do and forget the little differences."

"Come along," I answered.

I believe she genuinely meant it. It was nothing much to her that she had tried to cut my artery; since she had failed, it should be nothing much to me. In fact, I think she felt much more friendly than she ever had done; circumstances, from her viewpoint, had made intimacy almost unavoidable. She kept hold of my hand, locked her fingers in mine. I rather liked it.

Dorje paused beside the airplane, stared at it, then turned and smiled at me. The smile wrinkled his face and made him better looking. It was the mischievous, tolerant smile of an expert at an amateur's mistake.

HE RESUMED his stroll into the clearing, walking with his head a little forward as if thought were heavy. He had a strong neck and fine shoulders, but his legs looked spidery and spindly in proportion to his bulk; they could carry him well, but he seemed to dislike using them. I noticed for the first time that his clothing, too, was made of leather, dyed to resemble russet colored cloth and cut like no garments I had ever seen; they were so evidently comfortable that at first glance one was almost as unaware of them as he was.

In the near distance was the semi-circular group of buildings that we had seen from the plane. They looked now rather like farm buildings, but of a far better type than one would expect to find outside the United States or certain parts of Europe. There was a central building that resembled an enormous barn, with silos at one end, only they were too wide and not high enough to be regular silos and there was grass growing on their flat tops, so that whatever their use might be they were certainly not filled from above or from the outside. All the other buildings looked like dwellings or else store sheds. The clearing was possibly fifty acres in extent. There were a few small cows, some goats and chickens.

Baltis and I followed Dorje toward a building at the right of the big central barn. We walked slower than he did because my head was a bit woozy from the shaking up and Baltis, too, refused to be hurried.

"Have you been here before?" I demanded, and she shook her head.

"When I came down from Koko-nor it was by way of China. And when I went there it was by way of Russia and—"

She checked herself. She had evidently spoken unguardedly, telling the plain truth—something contrary to habit. She had been thinking furiously of something else.

"Listen," she said, "I dare not speak of that. While Dorje lives I dare not speak of it. He is too cruel. When he keels he is swift. But when he punishes—" She shuddered.

"Are you hoping to regain his favor?" I asked her.

"No, no. Impossible. But I am hoping to save Henri."

"Not in love with Grim now?"

"No. Jeemgreem is too impassionate. Henri de la Fontaine Coq is—oh, he is my ideal! He is perfect. Doubtless Dorje would employ him, only Henri is another who does not submit himself to domination—not by any one. I am afraid Henri will laugh at Dorje."

"What then?"

"He does not enjoy to be laughed at. And what he does not enjoy he abolishes."

"You expect him to abolish you?"

"Yes."

"Use your wits then. You and Vasantasena might—"

"You listen to me!" she interrupted. "Should Vasantasena keel him, there would be such vengeance on us all as it is impossible to imagine! Such tortures, such prolongation of the agony, such devilish ingenuity! And Dorje knows why she is here. He is no fool. He will use her, and me, and Henri, and us all as arguments to make Jeemgreem submit to him and become his lieutenant. Either

Jeemgreem does so, or he tortures us in Jeemgreem's presence. Oh, I know Dorje! Not for nothing did he give us opportunity to overtake him. He did not need to wait here. Northward from here he can travel by day and none the wiser, since who would believe a story of an airship crossing all those mountains?"

She sat down, pretending to remove a thorn or something from her sandal.

"I know him. I know how he reasons. He would argue that if we are worth troubling about, then we will find some way of overtaking Jeemgreem. And if we have that much ingenuity, then we are worth employment."

"Piffle!" I retorted. "If he's as shrewd as you say, he would know we would simply pretend to yield to him, and ditch him at the first chance."

"Yes?" she answered. "You have not yet seen the punishments! But he will show you. Furthermore, he will do what he did to Bertolini, and to me, and to my sister—and to all the others who know anything about him. He will force you to commit a crime for which there is no forgiveness if the crime is found out. None of Dorje's intimates can ever turn against him, because always there is that atrocity that never can be expiated. Whether you do it or not, he will construct the evidence. But he can offer such temptation—of such power and excitement—that they are not many who shrink from the practical pledge. He is persuasive."

"A hypnotist?"

"More. He knows the anatomy of emotions. He can produce them. And he is protected always by his bodyguard, who are devils on whom he imposes discipline."

Dorje had paused in a doorway. I saw him make a remark to his two attendants. He went inside. They turned back and approached us. Baltis refastened her sandal and took my hand again. We strolled forward and the two men waited for us.

"Tell Jeemgreem—he would not believe me—tell him I am truly his accomplice if he only will agree to save Henri."

Dorje's two attendants were impatient, beckoning.

"Come along," I answered. "All right, I will tell him. When did you and Henri reach your understanding?"

"Not yet. He does not yet know it. He has only begun to wonder why he is annoyed when I speak of Jeemgreem. Henri is a reincarnation of D'Artagnan, who was the greatest lover in the world! But he does not know that either—not yet. He is a vagrant. He has no loyalties. He is no good. But he is marvelous. I love him and he loves me."

CHAPTER XXXVII

"Dorje's at the end of his tether!"

WE ENTERED a long, narrow room, roughly beamed, with two small windows on the northern side, through which there was a view of snow topped mountains. Across the full width of the western end there was a platform, about three feet high, untidily loaded with Eastern rugs, and on a heap of those sat Dorje, crosslegged, leaning back against a pile of cushions.

He took almost no notice of us when a man in leather closed the door behind us—one glance under heavy eyelids and then attention again to the box-like instrument in front of him, as if he were playing chess and studying the next few moves ahead. To right and left of him, lolling but looking insolently capable of violence, were eight men.

Grim, dressed as when I last saw him, sat on a rug on the floor with his back to the wall near a hearth on which a dozen sticks were burning. Grim smiled, nodded, then resumed his faraway stare through one of the windows. He, too, might have been playing chess; his right hand moved at intervals as if he hesitated which line of attack to develop. Jeff sat opposite, reading Grim's signals. Chullunder Ghose, near Jeff, was studying the signals too.

Vasantasena had vanished; the only sign of her was a shawl hanging over the

edge of the platform, which I thought I recognized as hers, although I was not sure. Henri de la Fontaine Coq, picaresquely amused but looking pale as if he had been badly shaken by the crash, sat watching Dorje, leaning backward against a rough hewn post that supported a roof beam. There was another upright post, supporting the other end of the same beam; I went and sat against that, where I could see every one. Baltis stood in mid-room, facing Dorje, with her back to Henri Coq and me.

Grim spoke first, in English.

"No use keeping up the pretense that you're the Baltis from Marseilles. I have told Dorje how she died in the Cairo hospital, and that I got the key to his cipher from her. I have explained to him you are the one who reached Cairo by way of Cape Town. And I have told him how you changed identity in order to be able to worm your way into my confidence. It is a good job I told him. He had sentenced your sister to death for having made mistakes in France."

Dorje looked up. There was evidently something wrong with him. His was not the method or the manner of a superman who knows his power and decides all issues instantly. A medical man, in circumstances that excite imagination, makes mistakes as readily as any one, but I would have betted there and then that Dorje's brain was worn out, glowing and dying, glowing and dying like the embers of a once tremendous furnace—and that Dorje knew it.

I began to wonder. Dope seemed improbable, although I was sitting too far away from him to draw confident deductions about that. But he was certainly not the same dynamic monster that he had been, hardly fifteen minutes gone, when he interrupted Baltis's operation on my forearm. It seemed to me his lower lip had dropped a trifle, and the occasional movement of his left hand near his mouth suggested something wrong with the coordination of his faculties. He blazed up suddenly. He seemed to have forgotten the problem, or perhaps to believe he had solved it. Vanity lurked in his smile as he glanced toward Grim.

"You want her?"

"Yes," said Grim.

"Take her. You can have as many as you want. I'll show you how to kill her if she's no good."

"Come here," said Grim, and Baltis promptly arose and sat beside him; but she glanced at Henri Coq, who smiled and tilted both ends of his D'Artagnan mustache.

DORJE lurched off the pile of rugs and cushions, yet he walked without any noticeable difficulty, although he had the air of disliking to use his legs. He went out through a narrow door at the back of the platform, but the eight men remained where they were. They lolled and stared at us. One of them sprawled on his stomach on Dorje's rug pile and appeared to try to understand the box-like instrument. The others smiled at him. He smiled back, sat up, shrugged his shoulders and resumed his former place.

Grim glanced at me.

"You get it?"

"Cracking," I said, "that's obvious. Do you know what it is?"

"He calls it *soma*. He has probably gone out now to take some. If so, he won't be back for twenty minutes. He never sleeps. He takes that stuff instead. First it makes him relax. Then it makes him diamond hard and mentally alert. It's a drug the Atlanteans used."

"Where is Vasantasena?"

"God knows. He seemed afraid of her. Two men took her somewhere. I hope nothing happened."

"Stick to the point," said Jeff. "Tell us all you can before he gets back. I understood your signals to mean 'Success not quite impossible if we humor him.' Go on from there. I didn't get the rest of it."

"He's at the end of his tether," said Grim, "and he knows it. He may decide to kill us, and he may not. He broke down badly on the way here—nerves

gone—had the horrors; sees the Asiatic hells when he's in that condition, but has to control himself to keep his men from guessing what's wrong. So he talked to me. He found a buried city in the Gobi Desert, where the Atlantean secrets are all preserved in synthetic gold tablets in chests of the same metal—chemical formulæ, everything."

"I could have told you that," said Baltis.

"But you didn't."

"Benjamin mentioned it," said Jeff. "Go on."

"He hadn't brains enough himself to read them, or the patience either, but he had the luck to find a Chinese who could puzzle it out. He says it's a kind of key-language, in ideoform, not unlike Chinese. The chink found several men to help him, and between them they deciphered a lot of it, but there's oodles more. Dorje began experimenting with the formulæ that they translated into modern Chinese, and he soon found he could wreck the whole world, as the Atlanteans did, if he trained himself and taught some people to become receptive to his impulse.

"That's about how he phrased it. He decided to rule the world instead of absolutely wrecking it. And of course he had heard the legend about the Lord Maitreya's expected coming, so he began with propaganda about that, and by getting a rep as a great magician."

"How long has he been doing this?" Jeff asked.

"I don't know. He says he is more than eighty years old. He has kept himself going with chemical formulæ found in those gold chests. So has the Chinese. But the Chinese also is cracking."

"Out there in the Gobi?"

"No. No water or supplies out there. His first establishment was in Siberia. Do you remember reading of a cataclysm, said to be caused by an enormous meteor, that wiped out hundreds of square miles—about the time of the Armistice, I think it was? Wiped 'em out so absolutely that it was years before any one knew what had happened. That was his headquarters—his explosion, caused by him because his men rebelled. It was where he was making his thunderbolts. He blew 'em up—or rather, he made a woman do it; he says human nature is as easy to impose upon as rats and rabbits are, and he was bored with the woman anyhow.

"HIS next move was into Tibet, where he rebuilt an abandoned monastery to the north of Koko-nor. Tibet is closed territory. Tibetan monks are secretive and predisposed to anything of a supernormal nature. The Maitreya legend helped him. He was able to do almost anything he chose, under the cloak of religion. He established a college in his monastery and even obtained a sort of charter for it from the Dalai Lama.

"People flocked to him from all the ends of Asia, and he picked and chose until he had plenty of men—and women, too—to make his thunderbolts and poison gas. He began to train men and women to scatter all over the world and take advantage of communist, fascist—almost any kind of propaganda—stir unrest, discontent, preach pessimism.

"The discipline was simple; if they failed, or disobeyed him, they were simply betrayed to the police or to the military. When his agencies grew strong enough they set up secret courts of justice, such as Bertolini's in Cairo, and inflicted unspeakable tortures in the presence of one another, compelling the latest recruits to do the torturing, so that there was not much risk of their betraying one another, after that. And only picked men and women knew anything at all about himself, his purpose or his organization; all the others believe to this hour that they are communists, or fascists, or some other kind of savior of mankind.

"His plan was to destroy, in one week, all the modern ammunition in the world. That would leave all modern armies at the mercy of men with bows and arrows, swordsmen, spearmen, cavalry. And there would be no navies, no airplanes left. Asia can easily put ten million men

in the field, and Asia believes in the Lord Maitreya. All Dorje had to do was to keep himself out of the limelight and to plant his thunderbolts and flasks of poison gas.

"The idea of the gas, of course, is to bomb the legislatures of the world. Two or three flasks, for instance, tossed on to the floor of the Houses of Congress, two or three more in the White House, two or three dozen, say, in the Treasury and other important administrative buildings —do the same thing on the same day in a dozen or more countries; it only needs two or three hundred carefully instructed men—and where is the world's government?"

"Good riddance to it!" remarked Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "A politician is something to be cr-r-racked like a louse."

Grim glanced at him. I saw him glance sidewise at Baltis, too. Then he went on.

"However, Dorje saw he had no chance to succeed, even with his gas and thunderbolts, unless he could contrive a system of communication not connected with the wire or wireless systems of civilization. So he had to devise an instrument that would act, in a sense, like a mirror and respond—not to the broadcast thought wave; he says that is impossible, because of confusion—but to the reaction set up in the brain of the recipient.

"In other words, a man might look at the machine and see the thought to which his brain is responding unknown to himself. We found one of the machines in the Great Pyramid. There is another one there on the platform. He has to use it. He is getting worn out. He can no longer detect the messages his brain receives—or at any rate, not always.

"I was trained in Tibet, but I can only do it now and then. Chullunder Ghose can do it oftener than I can, Jeff not quite so often. Everybody can do it occasionally. But almost nobody understands it. Some call it playing hunches. Others call it being intuitive. The fact is, that the ether, which permeates all matter and is non-dimensional in any sense that our intelligence can grasp, is nevertheless more solid than any substance that we know of, and more sensitive than any photographic plate. A vibration set up in the ether is instantly spread in all directions. An explosion of dynamite might not affect the ether, because the vibration would be at the wrong rate. But a thought wave does affect it. That is the principle behind Dorje's system of communication. He explained it to me in the airship, on the way here."

DORJE came in, stood in the doorway holding to the posts, stared at us, made me shudder, and went away again. He looked less weary of himself. His eight men stirred with a vaguely felt restlessness. I felt it, too. So, I think, did the others. Grim continued.

"Dorje, among other things, has learned how to use antigravity—his name for it—which is the principle on which his airship works."

"I don't believe one word of that," said Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "Nothing can fly without gravity, not even a blimp."

Grim grinned.

"That is how he has preserved his secret. Nobody believed a word of it. His ships have been seen and reported by any number of people. He has two of them. Nobody believed the tales about chlorine gas until it wiped out a division of Ypres. Who believed in the telephone? It has been the same with Dorje's airship. And if you want rather worse humiliation than Bell got when he talked telephone, try talking antigravity to a group of scientists."

"Stick to your story," Jeff urged.

"All right. Dorje's greatest difficulty is his general staff. He calls them his *babus*. He hates and despises them. They probably hate him, and I'm betting on that."

"Why did he go to Delhi?" Jeff asked.

"According to his own account, in order to catch me. His theory is, that the best of all lieutenants is a defeated enemy, and he thinks he has defeated me by burning Vasatasena's house. His agents

in Delhi will say I burned it, and he thinks the secret service will believe that."

"They already do," said Jeff.

Grim nodded.

"He says he has watched me for a long time, and he badly needs a chief of staff. He's a strange mixture of slyness and naive frankness. He admits quite frankly that his plan has broken down, but he doesn't admit what I think is the obvious truth, that his staff have turned against him. He appears afraid of them. He speaks of them with the kind of bitter contempt with which Napoleon, on St. Helena, used to speak of some of his ex-generals."

"It is too simple, too obvious. I go to sleep," said Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "When I awake, then tell me that you still don't know the answer—and I will not believe you!"

"Henri—he has genius," said Baltis.

Henri de la Fontaine Coq composed himself for sleep. He removed his leather jacket and folded it for a pillow.

"Aviators have neither brains nor courage," said Chullunder Ghose, pointedly, deliberately insolent. "They are like birds that can be caught with seeds or quicklime. And a French aviator is the stupidest of all. Nobody but a French aviator would have been such a fool as to do what you have done."

Henri de la Fontaine Coq sat up again and forced himself awake.

"Your flattery is aimed at me?" he asked. He yawned. "I am unworthy of it, I assure you. I am not so stupid as to bet on logic against luck. If I were stupid I should be a banker or a commander-in-chief or a father of fifteen children, and very respectable. But I know luck when I see it."

Grim glanced quickly at Chullunder Ghose, nodded almost imperceptibly and looked away again. The *babu* resumed the offensive.

"A man who has been fool enough to ruin his career by flying into forbidden territory at the behest of an adventuress, is not a savant whose advice this *babu* would exchange for common sense. He has lost his plane. He has lost his reputation. He has lost his prospects—"

"And he has won the game!" said Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "You animal! You fat toad! There is nothing now to do but collect the stakes and spend them! It is too simple. We accept all of Dorje's proposals. We agree to everything. We even invent new staggering concepts for him. And we presently overturn him and avail ourselves of Dorje's riches. When it suits us, we dictate terms to the world. We become heroes. We are kissed by statesmen. But what we will do afterward to save ourselves from being destroyed by boredom, I am a fat priest if I know! Meanwhile, please awaken me when something happens."

He disposed himself again for sleep, curling up like a dog with his head on the folded leather jacket.

"Do you dare?" Grim asked him. But he was asleep already.

"There is nothing that he does not dare," said Baltis. "I assure you, Henri is an absolutist."

"Self am opposite of absolutist, whatever that is," said Chullunder Ghose. "I bet you pounds Egyptian fifty—"

"Steady!" said Grim through the side of his mouth. "Here comes Dorje."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"A leader without a plan is more exciting than a plane without a rudder."

HE LOOKED like another being, a different monster, revived by the stuff he had drunk. His Mongolian features seemed to have been sharpened. His eyes glittered. He looked as unsympathetic as flint, as devoid of humor as a fish. His head now was erect on his neck, and his neck looked almost brittle, it was so incapable of bowing to any mood or morals not approved of by the bulging brain. There was a suggestion of the gladiator grown contemptuous of fear from too much use of its effect on others. Even his spidery legs had new strength; they were under him, instead

of seeming afraid of his weight. And when he spoke, although he still could not pronounce the letter S, his voice had the jarring gracelessness of power that is beyond passion and not qualified by doubt.

"He smells of ice," said Baltis in an undertone. "Do you know now why a woman neither loves nor hates him, but obeys?"

"Now I go," said Dorje. "You come. Kick that shluggard awake, or I will have him vivishected. Shtand up, closhe together; all fache that way."

I shook Henri de la Fontaine Coq and he struck at me, as if he resented being dragged out of a dream. But he was on his feet in a minute.

Dorje gave an order in a strange tongue to one of his men. They all came scrambling off the platform and lined up behind us. They stank of sour milk, rancid butter, yak dung, sweat and rotten fish. The man behind me breathed on the back of my neck and it felt like being chosen for a python's dinner.

"*Schlaa!*" said Dorje—or a word that sounded like it.

A man opened the door and led the way, swaggering into the sunlight, turning there, licking his lips. I would have preferred to have been killed by a hyena. Nothing in the whole world is as loathsome as a human being who has forgotten that he is one. For a second or two I think all of us, Baltis included, believed we were about to be killed. My own thought was that Dorje had overheard our conversation and had decided to make short work of us. It was one of life's abominable moments.

We were shepherded into the entrance of the central building. There was a kind of hallway, about twelve feet long with a door at either end. It was bare of furniture. All except two of our custodians disappeared through the inner door without giving us a chance to see what was on the far side. The other two appeared to have no fear of our escaping; they leaned with their backs to the doors, with the hilts of long knives thrust forward. They chewed something that stank, and spat unskillfully. If they had any other weapons than their knives they did not show them, and it seems likely that we might have rushed them successfully, but I don't know what good that would have done.

Henri de la Fontaine Coq was the first to make any remark.

"Kill Dorje—yes? Then seize everything?"

"Get this," said Grim. "If you try it, I'll kill you! All of you, I want this understood: if Dorje dies too soon, that will leave what he calls his *babus* in control of things. They're infinitely worse than he is, because there are more of them. We've got to wreck them first, Dorje last. We need him in order to reach them."

"All right. What's your plan?" the Frenchman asked.

"I haven't one."

"*Très bon.* Then I assume command. You all obey me."

JEFF took him by the left arm and the back of the neck. The Frenchman struggled for a moment, but he was as helpless as a fly on a sticky paper, and he had sense enough to try to be funny about it.

"*Peste!* I was not built to come to pieces that way!"

Jeff threatened to crack his head against the wall.

"We obey Grim!"

"Oh, yes, absolutely!"

"Even if he misleads!"

"Why not? A leader without a plan is more exciting than a plane without a rudder."

The two guards grinned but made no move to interfere and Jeff backed away. Henri de la Fontaine Coq approached Grim.

"Let us see what a leader you are. You evidently please that mammoth. If you can amuse me—"

"I can use you," Grim answered. "After the event you may have all the glory. All of it—the loot, too, if there is any."

"*Mon dieu.* Have you no ambition?"

"Plenty. I will try to get you fellows

out of this alive. But the game comes first."

"*Nom d'un mystère.* What game?"

"At the moment, this one."

"He is an icicle," said Baltis. "Only, an icicle can melt, but he not!"

The door opened. A man beckoned us, and we were given not much time to observe our surroundings. Other men came. We were crowded, hustled forward into a great shed built of undressed stone and mortar. There were tanks, and gages on the tanks; and from the inside the building seemed oval, not circular. In the midst was Dorje's airship—pearl gray, almost opal—and it was longer than it had looked when we saw it rise out of Vasantasena's garden.

From below it looked cylindrical, with fluted ends that suggested something new in streamline. Owing to the color of the metal of which the thing was made it seemed likely that the shape would be very confusing if seen from below from a distance; in certain lights it might be half invisible—perhaps not visible at all.

It was made of metal plates joined edgewise, not overlapping. Some sort of welding process. The seams had been rubbed smooth, but half round ridges had been left that gave it a peculiarly neat appearance; but those ridges, too, seemed likely to catch sunlight and produce camouflage, whether or not that was intended.

There were rough steps made of boxes piled on one another. We were shepherded up those and through an opening in the airship's side into a chamber about fifteen feet long. The bulkheads at either end appeared to be made of glass; at any rate, it was something perfectly transparent, except for narrow doors in either bulkhead that were made of wood, not metal. There were several more transparent bulkheads and we could see through those about two-thirds of the interior; but the bow and the stern were invisible—apparently the bulkheads there were made of metal without openings of any sort, but those sealed ends were much too short to possess any lifting capacity in the event that they were filled with gas.

There were mattresses strewn on the floor and on what appeared to be tanks along the sides of our compartment. Those tanks, too, were much too small to possess lifting power, and as a matter of fact they contained liquid ballast which we could hear splashing soon after we started.

We could see out; there were four small windows set in the metal sides above the tanks and below the widest diameter of the hull, so that the easiest view was downward. An enormous flask of water hung from the roof in slings, but there was no food in sight and we were all of us ravenously hungry as well as sore eyed from lack of sleep.

There was no machinery that looked capable of producing power; but a tube, apparently of some metal alloy, about two feet in diameter, extended the entire length of the ship immediately under the roof but not quite touching it. It appeared to be carefully insulated where it passed through the bulkheads, and it was held rigidly in place by a perfect spider web of metal struts. There were similar vertical tubes, in pairs, against the fore and aft metal bulkheads; and there was another tube, of the same diameter, secured in the form of a circle to a circular plane table marked with degrees on the roof of a compartment twenty feet astern of ours.

Beneath that circular tube were what appeared to be the controls, in the form of three long levers; one of them rose through a slot in a metal housing on the floor; the others were on either side of the housing. Above those levers was a wheel connected to the circular tube overhead, and that appeared to be the steering apparatus.

THERE was no sound of moving machinery, no smell of heat or lubricating oil, no indication that I could detect of any motive power whatever. A crew of eight men—not the same who had herded us—lounged in the forward compartment, and there was one man seated in what ap-

peared to be a conning tower in the roof; we could only see his legs, which rested on a metal platform that could be reached by an iron ladder from the compartment immediately astern of that one containing the controls.

Through a door in the side of that compartment a heavy, iron bound, padlocked wooden box, about as big as a coffin container and about the same shape, was hoisted and shoved in by four of the men who had shepherded us. Then Dorje's thought detecting instrument was carried in and set exactly in the middle of the floor. The same four men then fastened up the door of our compartment from the outside, using screw bolts, after which they entered through the other door and passed through to a compartment at the stern.

Then Dorje came, still looking full of vitality but once more awkward on his feet; he had a hard time getting through the opening, but once in there he sat on some blankets on a tank like those in our compartment and tucked his legs under him as if that was their normal position. A man followed him lugging a heavy box like a sea captain's medicine chest, which he set on the tank beside Dorje. Then the same man closed the door of that compartment from the inside, after which he joined the others in the stern.

One man, who looked like a mongrel Chinese-Tibetan, came aft now, passing through our compartment to the control room, where he took hold of one of the levers. Dorje watched him, and presently spoke to him through a tube; there was another tube from close by Dorje's seat that evidently reached up to the conning tower. The silence was death-like. No sound whatever reached us from the outside—not even when they rolled back the huge shed door, as they must have done—until some one struck the hull with a hammer. That appeared to be the all clear signal. Dorje sat back, pressing himself against the bulkhead. Then he laughed. He enjoyed our discomfort immensely.

The man at the controls jerked his lever forward and we started so suddenly, and so swiftly, that it threw us all in a heap on the floor. There appeared to be two simultaneous motions—a foot or two upward, and forward with the speed of an arrow. The sensation was of being caught in a tremendous stream that was already in motion—almost of being caught by a conveyor belt, so that we started at top speed without any interval of gaining headway. It was not in the least like the motion of flying, and there was neither sound nor vibration. Chullunder Ghose was instantly and noisily sick; he abandoned optimism.

There was room for one of us at each small window, but the speed was so great that by the time we looked out there were no recognizable landmarks, and since we could not see astern there was no means of knowing how far we had come from the place we had left. The ship was rising rapidly, but on a perfectly even keel, although there was a perceptible roll and a slight pitching that were probably due to the resistance of the wind. The only sound came from the swishing of liquid ballast, and that was rather a relief from the weird lack of any mechanical sounds. Civilization has so accustomed us to the din of friction that its absence, when anything happens, is almost terrifying—and a silent terror is enormously worse than one that thunders, since we discount thunder from experience.

A man brought us food—cold, half cooked meat and parched barley. We devoured it ravenously, beastly though the meat was. It was tossed to us as if we were animals cooped in a cage. Dorje, leaning back against a bulkhead, chewed parched barley as if his teeth were none too comfortable, and at intervals he sipped something from a bottle out of the box that resembled a medicine chest. It was noticeable that he allowed no one to wait on him; he produced his barley from an inside pocket of his leather coat.

Except for those outstanding memories the whole experience was like a dream—exactly like a dream, and just as difficult to recall in sequence and detail. That is possibly due to the fact that we needed

sleep so badly. Henri de la Fontaine Coq curled himself up on a mattress on the floor, with three times his share of the blankets, and began to snore before we were in the ship ten minutes. Grim was wide eyed. Baltis yawned and struggled to keep her faculties alert. Chullunder Ghose moaned on the floor until I took a couple of blankets off the aviator and covered him up, after which he slept and snored too. Jeff and I watched each other to see which would yield first.

Then a man came in and spoke gruffly to Grim in Tibetan. He made peremptory gestures, holding the door in the bulkhead open to keep it from slamming when the ship pitched in the wind. There was much more wind by that time; we could indistinctly hear it shrieking against the conning tower and along the flutings of the hull. Grim explained.

"I'm to go to Dorje. I wish the rest of you would sleep, if you can. I'm good for another hour or two, but after that I'll have to turn in and it won't do for all of us to be asleep at the same time."

Grim went aft. I saw him sit down on the opposite tank, facing Dorje. Jeff and I removed another blanket from the aviator, gave two to Baltis, and then turned in together, on one mattress, for the sake of each other's warmth.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"Give me dope—lots of it!"

GRIM touched me on the shoulder, and as Jeff and I sat up and stared at him I could feel the ship pitching far more violently than it had done. There was a horrible corkscrew motion.

"We're descending," said Grim. "Present elevation about eleven thousand. We're dropping into the wind that sweeps Tibet from the north."

Henri de la Fontaine Coq sat up.

"Who took my blankets? No wonder I freeze! You should have demanded others." He stared around him. "We are all crazy, I tell you."

"Give me something," said Grim, "that will keep me awake. Dope. Lots of it. I mustn't quit. Shoot me full of the stuff."

I objected, vigorously. So did Jeff. Grim put it bluntly.

"Don't be idiots. One death's as good as another if a man is on-side."

I felt for my pocket case. Jeff snatched it from me.

"Very well," said Grim, "I'll have to use Dorje's stuff. But it relaxes before it gets its work in."

He was gone before we could prevent him. Through the transparent bulkhead we could see him talking to Dorje, who gave him a big bottle from the brass bound box. Jeff hurried after him, but before he could find out how to open the door Grim had swallowed about a tumblerful of milky looking liquid that he poured into a glass bowl. Judging by the expression on his face the stuff was bitter. He returned. He sat down on our mattress.

"Damned idiot!" said Jeff affectionately. "Now you're all in!"

Grim only smiled at him. I felt his pulse. It was about 60 already. His eyes had lost their steel, if that describes it, but they looked amused.

"I'll feel vigorous," he said, "in twenty minutes."

Chullunder Ghose sat up. He stared at Grim.

"What is it?" he demanded. And when I told him, "Oh, my God!"

"Shut up!" Jeff growled at him.

"I tell you, I know all about it," said the *babu*. "No, sahib! Give him no antidote—there is none; you will kill him! Let him keep still. If you increase his heart beats he will fall dead!"

I laid Grim on his back. He took no notice, although he was perfectly conscious; he seemed able to control his arms and legs but too indifferent to do it. I took his temperature. 90.

"He is done for!" Chullunder Ghose forgot his own physical distress. He was afraid of something that he understood, and which Jeff knew about, but which I neither understood nor knew. "From now

on he must either have that stuff or die in torture!"

"He is drunk, that's all," said Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "It does a man good to get drunk now and then—now and then. I also wish to drink myself into a mood. What has he? Give me some of it."

"He is not drunk at all," said Baltis. "If he has drunk *soma*, you will shortly see him ten times abler than he evaire was. But afterward—"

"Am nihilistic absolute negationist from now on," said Chullunder Ghose. "There will be no afterwards. We have lost our Jimmy Jimgrim—"

"Shut up!" Jeff commanded.

"Smash me! What do I care! Worst has happened! Let me tell you. Jimmy Jimgrim presently will blaze up and be brilliant. But after a certain length of time he will have to have more *soma*. Perhaps he will take it once more, or even twice more—because he is absolutist—he will absolutely do his job, whatever it costs him. But then he will still need *soma*. And he will not take it, even if he could get it. So he will die, in great agony. Worse agony, I tell you, than a death from any other cause. Worse than death by Chinese tortures. Jimmy Jimgrim goes over the top, I assure you."

"Let us steal some *soma*. Let us all take some of it," Baltis suggested. "Wait—I will go and ask Dorje. Perhaps he will give it to us. Why not? Dorje, if he has a use for us, may wish to sharpen our intelligence. But we will use our intelligence to destroy him and obtain his supply of *soma*. I will go to Dorje. I will try to coax some *soma* from him."

"Yes. We might as well die with our fusilage on fire," said Henri de la Fontaine Coq.

"Sit down!" Jeff commanded. "And shut up!"

He was so worried about Grim that he almost forced me to forget where we were. His whole huge frame seemed overcharged with an emotion that he suppressed with a will that was as dynamic as his muscles. But he could not suppress Chullunder Ghose.

"Am busted flush. Am anything the cat dragged in. Am no good any more. So what do I care? I, who have tasted all adversity, and all contempt, and every species of disillusion, I am in *profundis*. Come to hell, all of you! Come, I say, come! There is no other place! That man is the only friend I ever had. He trusted me. He even made me trust myself. He treated me exactly as his equal. I am a scoundrel, and he knew it, but he trusted me, absolutely. I became a needle with a pole to point to. And now, Jimmy— Oh, Jimmy Jimgrim—"

HE COLLAPSED in tears, and there is almost nothing less exhilarating than a fat man crying. However, Grim stirred and that stirred us, so that even Jeff's strain eased a little. Grim's pulse improved. I could feel his temperature rise without the aid of the thermometer. His eyes changed; they resumed the steely blue-gray hue. He sat up, yawned, smiled, braced himself, nodded at Jeff, then at me—but he spoke first to the *babu*.

"Yes, it's over the top. You're right, I've always trusted you. I do now. You will, please, honor our mutual friendship by carrying on until you haven't a resource left. Then you'll take yours standing up, like any other man whose friendship is worth having."

"All right, Jimmy."

I had never suspected Grim of being sentimental. There were several things about him that I had not suspected, which, however, began to emerge under the influence of the same drug that had turned Dorje into a devil. He began to talk rapidly.

"Listen, please. I want you men to understand me, before this *soma* makes me too keen-cut to talk. I'm in a middle mood at present. You, too, Baltis: listen, it won't hurt you. Five or ten minutes from now I'll be at white heat and unable to discuss anything. Aim—aim—aim and nothing else; I only hope my aim is accurate. I took the stuff because it seemed to me that one of us must go the

limit in order to get on terms with Dorje. It is my job to go the limit. I don't believe in leading from the rear. I'm good now for about thirty-six hours of all I've got in me. Then I'm burned out. You men carry on."

"Without you?" Jeff asked.

"Sure thing. There is only one problem in life, for any one, in any set of circumstances: What are you going to do about it? The answer, of course, is, do your best—your utmost. That's what we're here for—to learn to enjoy using our own judgment. It's how the soul grows. Dorje has probably damned his soul by selfishness, but that's his affair. His intellectual audacity is prodigious. He discovered scientific secrets that put power in his hands; and his determination to make himself King of the World entailed, as he knew, ice cold thinking, which is the most difficult and exhausting work there is. He had a right to try it if he chose. I have an equal right to try to prevent him. I can't without getting on terms with him. That's why I took the stuff. He knows why I took it."

Henri de la Fontaine Coq reached forward and touched Grim's knee.

"Give me some. Drunk, I am insuperable. Then together we will scr-r-ag him. Afterward—"

Jeff s scowl and growl silenced him, or possibly he gave more heed to Baltis' warning gesture. Grim continued.

"I have passed my word to Dorje to give him all the aid I can until he has reduced his *babus*, as he calls them, to submission. It was the only way. He would have destroyed us otherwise. While you fellows were asleep, he and I had it out. We dickered to a showdown. I'm to help him, on condition that he does no sort of injury to any of you, including Baltis, while the contract lasts. It terminates the moment he has licked his own gang. Then we make a new deal, or none—whichever suits both or either of us."

"Can you trust him?" Jeff asked.

"No. But he can trust me, and he knows it. You see, he knows my motive. If his gang succeeded in deposing him they'd scough him and there'd be about a hundred of 'em free to play hell with the world. And they'd do it. They'd be infinitely worse than he is. They'd quarrel among themselves undoubtedly, but in the process they'd wreck civilization—just as the war lords are wrecking China.

"Dorje intends, of course, to scough me—all of us—as soon as he has dealt with his rebels. He knows I know that. But he considers we'll be easy victims, whereas his own gang at the moment are like Cæsar's friends, at one and the same time treacherous and indispensable. They're indispensable because he has divided up responsibility between them. None of them knows all his secrets; each of them, however, knows at least one secret. And they're jealous of each other, which is probably the only reason why they haven't killed him long ago. They damaged his other airship recently—although he says they deny it—in order to restrict his movements; and he caught and killed a dozen of them who were trying to damage this one."

"How does it work?" demanded Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "It is as unexciting as a houseboat. There is no uncertainty. What moves it?"

"I don't half understand it," Grim answered, "but it follows the earth's magnetic currents, which are as intricate and differentiated as the web spun by a spider. There are main currents, and all sorts of diagonal and cross-currents, with what he calls dead places between them where there is no current at all. When they strike one of those places they have to rise or fall until the wind takes them into a current again."

"What makes it rise?"

"I don't understand that either. He says, antigravity. In other words—mind you, I quote him; this is not my own opinion; I haven't one—any force, of whatever kind, can be converted and reversed, although its motion can't be made to cease. There is a substance in those tubes—so he says—that in some way reverses the centripetal pull of gravity. The tubes lift, and the hull pulls

downward; they determine the elevation by adjusting the proportion between the upward and downward pull."

"What steers it?"

"He explained that, too, but I can't grasp it. That circular tube in some way sets up a resistance against which they can straighten the ship with the wheel."

HENRI de la Fontaine Coq emerged out of his mask. He became excited, earnest. His eyes, normally so scornful and superior to the thrill of even his own emotions, actually blazed.

"We could go to the moon! To the planets! Let us do that! Let us steal this thing and do it!"

Grim smiled.

"We have five, ten—possibly fifteen minutes in which to talk sense before my faculties take charge of me and I become a sort of automatic and impersonal engine. I can feel this *soma* working. What it does is to release the inhibitions; or perhaps I should say it paralyzes them. Whatever real character a man has, takes charge. Jeff, I want a promise from you."

"I'm your friend," said Jeff. "There's nothing you would ask me that I wouldn't do. What is it?"

"Dorje has kept himself drunk on the stuff since he first learned how to make it from the Atlantean formula. He has reached the stage where it doesn't work the way it used to. It releases the devil in him; but it has even burned the devil, so that he isn't as keen edged as he used to be. But you can see what it releases."

"Well?" said Jeff. "What of it?" He looked scared. It is not in the least agreeable to see a strong man frightened.

Grim broke ice, abruptly.

"If I act up badly, kill me."

"Damn your eyes, I knew you were heeled with a barbed hook!"

"I would do the same for you," said Grim. "I wouldn't let you do dirt. Hurry up, Jeff; this stuff's gaining on me!"

"All right, it's a promise. Dammit, Jim—you make demands on friendship."

"I know who my friends are. Listen. You see that big chest in Dorje's compartment—not the one he takes his bottles from—the big one?"

"Yes. What's in it?"

"Vasantasena."

"Dead?"

"No. Living. He intends to fill her up with *soma*. And he says she loves him."

"That is true," said Baltis. "In her heart she loves him, though with her brain she hates. But men know nothing about women—nothing."

Grim continued.

"Therefore, drunk with *soma*, she will sacrifice herself to save his day for him."

"She will act exactly as her heart impels her," said Chullunder Ghose. "That is what *soma* does to people."

"All women do that anyhow," said Baltis.

Grim glanced at her, and continued.

"But Vasantasena has refused to taste the stuff. She knows its potency."

"And she wishes to hate him. Why not? All Dorje's women wish to hate him." Baltis was in a mood for revelation of her own experience, but Jeff scowled and she checked herself.

Grim continued.

"So he has her locked in there until it suits him to use force to make her drink the stuff."

"He is using it now," said Jeff.

Two men had come forward from the stern compartment. They were opening the chest. Dorje had the big, pearl colored bottle in his hand. One of the men reached down into the chest and dragged Vasantasena upright, back toward us. Dorje showed her the bottle. He spoke—I saw his lips move. Vasantasena reached out for the bottle, and I think she meant to snatch and break it, but Dorje and his two men also thought so.

One of them seized her head and bent it back. The other wrapped the corners of her *sari* on his thumbs and thrust his thumbs between her jaws. Then Dorje poured the stuff into her open mouth and, with his own left hand, so pressed the muscles of her throat that she was obliged

to swallow. He poured in lots of it. She lay down.

"Have I talked rot?" Grim asked. "I feel as if I were coming out from under laughing gas. By gad, though—"

"What?" Jeff asked him.

"Nothing." Then, after a moment, "I can understand now how this ship works. I can see—"

He paused again. Henri de la Fontaine Coq opened his mouth, hesitated, spoke.

"Then tell me how it works. I will go to the moon!"

"You may go to the devil," said Grim, "when I have finished this job. Meanwhile, you will do what I tell you or take the consequences."

"I will go to the moon," he repeated. "I wonder that Dorje never did it. Or—perhaps—did he?"

Baltis crossed the floor and sat beside him.

"Henri, I go with you!"

For a while they two talked French in low tones, very rapidly. Grim stared into infinity. The ship pitched like a barrel on a big sea in a gale.

CHAPTER XL

"Wreck his bugs' nest. Him we kill last."

I WENT to a window. Baltis volunteered the information that we had left Chak-sam and the Tsang-po River leagues away behind us and beneath us. We were flying low and it was sunset, with a howling wind lashing the anger of Koko-nor. No need to ask what lake that was. There is no other body of water that it possibly could have been. We were flying slightly to the westward of it; I could see the desolate salt marshes and wastes of sterile desert left by the ever shrinking inland sea. There were clouds of wild fowl settling for the night. Not a human being. Not a human habitation. Loneliness, dreariness, and the depressing twilight gray that only swampland knows.

Something Grim said—though the actual words escaped me—was so startling that I suddenly realized what state my nerves were in. And I was no exception; we had all jumped when he spoke to us. Jeff was ashen colored under the sunburn. Baltis looked like painted porcelain, because the rouge on cheeks and lips was too red for the blanched skin. Chullunder Ghose was too air sick to look anything but haggard. Henri de la Fontaine Coq had assumed an air of truculence without effectually hiding fear; and all of us, except him, were suffering from the swift change of elevation. Grim, it seemed to me, was undergoing mental torture, as if he fought within himself for courage to face something much more terrible than death. He spoke again:

"The hell is, I remember human values. However, here goes."

He went aft into Dorje's compartment. Dorje took one glance at him and grew afraid. He stood up, pushing himself off the tank with both hands, and they two faced each other. Scared, dreading what might happen, and entirely ignorant of what weapons Dorje might have, or what his mens' attitude was toward Grim and the rest of us, Jeff and I followed, with Chullunder Ghose close at our heels and all three of us doing our best to seem casual. We were in time to hear the end of Grim's speech.

"So don't try treachery, for I can see the color of your thought. The bargain is: I'm your ally until your *babus* are defeated. After that, you and I fight it out, and the winner take all. Where is the stuff?"

He stooped and took the *soma* from the box, passed it to Jeff, not taking his eyes off Dorje.

"Give that to Crosby. Crosby, up that ladder there's a hatch. You'll find a portlight facing aft. Unfasten it, and throw that bottle out. Then fasten it again. If the man at the top makes trouble, Jeff will take him by the legs and brain him against the bulkhead."

I obeyed in a hurry. The big, stinking Turkoman who kept the lookout in the streamlined conning tower refused to make room for me and I needed both hands, one for the bottle, which was

heavy, and one for the ladder. But Jeff seized his foot and twisted it until he crowded himself against the framework, so that I had room to struggle up beside him.

The front was rather like the windshield of an auto, only sloping backward at a sharper angle. At the sides and the rear there were square ports. I undid eight thumbscrews of a rear port and threw out the bottle, which fell, I believe, into Koko-nor, since we were passing at that moment, at an elevation of a thousand feet or so, above an arm of the lake that sprawled into the marshland like a river estuary.

Then I sat on the uncomfortable metal seat beside the Turkoman, who resented it but offered no resistance. There was no attempt whatever at comfort in that airship; probably its builders took their cue from the gruesome wilderness around them—raw, cold, gale swept. Comfort, in a land like that, was probably as productive of a feeling of guilt as Gregorian music would be in a Scots kirk.

On a ledge in front of us, too far away to rest our elbows on it, just at the foot of the sloping window, were three crudely constructed switches something like those on an electric surface car; but they were apparently not in use just then; the man at the wheel beneath us did the steering; the man beside me apparently signaled him by striking one heel or the other against the sides of the ladder. But there was very little steering needed; it was quite possible to imagine that we were flowing, against the wind, in the stream of one of the earth's magnetic currents. Perhaps my ignorance of what magnetic currents are, and how they function, made it all the easier to imagine.

STRAIGHT ahead of us, fifteen or twenty miles away, there was a group of low hills, hardly more than dunes, that might have been islands when Koko-nor was vastly wider than it is now. In the weird, wild quarter-light that follows sunset at that altitude they resembled the bones of a monster. Wind had cut them until spine-like hummocks lay along their summit. To the eastward they were higher, as if the monster's head lay pillowed on a low hill. And where the monster's eye might be there was one blue light—as blue as those they use on the underground tracks in the New York railroad stations.

By the movement of the pools and shadowy clumps of marsh grass beneath us I guessed our speed at eighty miles an hour, against that wind, until the Turkoman beside me spoke abruptly to the man beneath us. Then we slowed down to about half that speed, which enormously reduced the pitching, although the sidewise roll continued. It was growing darker and the stars looked so big that nothing—absolutely nothing anywhere — seemed real. It was like a dreadful dream that grew more dreadful as we approached those low hills. A baleful sheen of cold blue light appeared above them—dim, like a luminous mist; and yet there was no mist; there was too much wind for mist to concentrate, and there was not a trace of moisture on the outside of the window.

On the inside, moisture from our breath began to freeze and cloud the window, but the Turkoman growled to the man at the controls and in a moment I could feel heat rising. He leaned forward and wiped the window with a sour smelling cloth.

There was no light in the airship. Down below me I could hear Grim's voice, and then Jeff's. Once I thought I heard Vasantasena, and then Dorje's metallic voice, but there was no sound from the others. I could not see down into the dark compartment, and it was impossible to hear what was said, partly because of the swishing of the liquid ballast. Grim would shout if he needed me. I decided to stay where I was—fascinated. It was like a dream of death, a ferry load of souls and stinking Charon at the helm. Ahead lay Limbo, cold, pale, mysterious.

We were heading straight toward the motionless blue light that seemed so like a pupil of a monster's eye. It grew bigger, but not brighter. We appeared to

aim ourselves straight at it. The man beside me struck both heels against the ladder and I heard a lever clank. They had shut off power. For a moment the wind checked and veered us, but the man beside me took a switch in each hand and we began to move ahead again. No pitching now whatever, and a lot less roll than formerly. The blue light seemed to race toward us, and it kept growing bigger and bigger.

The Turkoman thrust both switches forward to their limit and then seized the third one; he seemed able to control our speed with that exactly as he pleased. We slowed almost to a snail's pace. I believed then, and I still believe it, that our nose was being drawn toward a magnet that formed the mooring; I think the first two switches kept us straight, and that the third one increased or diminished the pull of the magnetic current on the airship's nose.

The wind ceased. We were in the lee of a big shed, creeping into it, and the light came from a ball of what looked like metal at the far end. I could see men on platforms of undressed stone and packed earth. But before we passed into the shed I got one glimpse, to right and left, of our surroundings.

Such a glimpse as that is no basis for an accurate description. It was almost more confusing than if I had seen nothing at all. A nightmare would be just as easy to recall from memory—a nightmare of gloomy walls and fortresses, enclosed within a rampart of alluvial mud, illuminated by pale blue light that streamed through doors and windows, throwing monstrous shadows against beehive mounds of mud and masonry that looked like black breasts burning; but the flame within them, glimpsed through slot-like openings at the bottom, seemed to give no heat.

We slid into the shed. The airship's nose made contact with the blue lighted ball. The man beside me closed two switches and left the third one opened to the limit. There was a clanging of metal as the men on the platforms began opening the doorways in the ship's sides—both sides this time; and they were swift—it was hardly a minute before light poured in along with icy air; and before I could reach the ladder foot they were already dragging out the chest in which Vasantasena had lain imprisoned.

GRIM was already outside. Dorje was out ahead of him; I saw him talking to a small man in a bearskin overcoat, who had a snub nose and a graceless cockney accent—caught about a dozen words:

"Hi says 'e's sick! I tell yer, sick ain't 'alf of it. 'E's craizy!"

We—Jeff, Baltis, Henri de la Fontaine Coq, myself—were herded by the airship's crew and driven out on to the platform. There were thirty men there, as grimy as stevedores, coated in half dressed leather to which dirt clung like soot on cobwebs. Some of them—the broader hipped ones—possibly were women. Presently I saw Vasantasena standing in a shadow beside Grim, who was talking to her; but she seemed to be trying to hear what Dorje and the bearskin cockney man were saying.

"Sick, I tell yer! And now the messages ain't workin'. No news—and they say you done it. Taike my tip, guv'nor, and get ter 'ell out of 'ere afore they maike an end of yer!"

Dorje beckoned and one of the airship's crew ran swiftly. He seized the cockney from behind, set a knee against his spine and jerked his head back. I was unable to see what weapon the cockney used, but he struck behind him as he almost turned a back spring, fell and lay still. I supposed his neck was broken. His assailant swayed and fell on top of him. I saw the cockney's hand twitch. Dorje also saw it. He beckoned Grim.

"You kill him."

Grim did not hesitate. He stooped over the two, on one knee, holding out his right hand. Dorje laid a knife on it, flat on the palm. Grim's fingers closed; he plunged the knife in, withdrew it, wiped it on the bearskin, passed it back to Dorje and then set his face close to the cockney's

as if listening for breath or heartbeats.

"Quite dead," he remarked, getting up.

"Conshpirator," said Dorje. "Thish way."

Grim followed him. Vasantasena followed Grim. The rest of us were herded by the airship crew and driven along the platform toward the blue-lighted ball; but I was never close enough to that thing to be able to describe it, except that it appeared to be semi-transparent.

As we passed the cockney I saw his eyelids flutter. There was blood—a lot of it; but it seemed to me some, if not all of the blood flowed from the corpse on top of him. We came to a rough gap in the wall, and as we were herded through that I had a chance to look back. I could no longer see the cockney, although the other man's body lay face downward where it had been.

Then the shed went pitch-dark with a suddenness that made one's ear drums throb with the instinctive leap to relieve a dead sense with a live one. It was even darker in that passage we had entered. Two of our custodians shouted and ran, I suppose to get the light turned on again. The remaining four began to drive us along the passage. Two of them had crowbars; one could understand those even better than the hoarse commands they uttered, although I think Jeff understood their speech. Baltis slipped in front of me to save herself from being prodded. Jeff's voice — sharp and sudden—

"Keep behind me!"

He burst back past me like a gun team going into action. I heard his fist thud like a battering-ram. No crowbar fell—not that time—Jeff had that one, and it almost struck me as he swung with it to crack skulls. The second crowbar, dropped by a man whose brains splashed like an egg-yolk, rolled against my shins and was seized by Henri de la Fontaine Coq. By that time there were four men down in front of us and Jeff was in the gap in the wall—shadow against darkness—just discernible. I picked up Baltis to keep her feet out of the blood that might be oozing underfoot. Then Chullunder Ghose:

"Look out, Rammy sahib! Oh, my—"

His shout saved Jeff's life. The two guards who had run when the light went out came creeping back. They rushed Jeff suddenly. Warned by Chullunder Ghose, Jeff did the unexpected—stepped forward instead of back into the gap—then turned and let them have it. There were undoubtedly other men not far away, but for the moment it felt as if we stood alone in dark infinity. There was not a sound except the moaning of wind on the shed roof, but there was a sensation in front of us as if eternity were moving sidewise, toward the left. Alternatively, we were being moved toward the right.

"If this is death, how painless was the passing!" said Chullunder Ghose. "What killed us?"

"Baltis!" That was Grim's voice. He was invisible. On the heels of that talk about death the suggestion was blood curdling. Baltis shuddered and pressed against me. However, it was not Grim's ghost; he stepped toward us—another shadow, no more visible than Jeff's.

"Are you there, Baltis? You and the Frenchman get into that airship."

HENRY DE LA FONTAINE COQ took Baltis by the arm and hurried her. He shook her. Suddenly a pin prick of light gave us something to focus on. It was a struck match. Some one lighted a candle—inside the airship, and one could tell then what had moved and made the night seem to be sliding apart. The airship's nose was no longer fast to anything. That cockney was standing beside the controls with his hand on a lever. Two doors, on the far side, had been closed and several men were screwing up the bolts of the forward door on our side, but they were having difficulty because the slightest pressure seemed to make the ship move. Grim spoke French then.

"Coq, you and Baltis help him to get the ship outside about a mile away, and wait for us. You may need all your skill

to make him wait for us. He hasn't the slightest notion who I am. Don't tell him. If you keep him mystified—"

Coq hurried away with Baltis and the airship started backward, with a door wide open and one door only partly fastened almost before they could jump through the opening. It swung so that its nose just missed us, and there was a great difference now that the power was on. It struck the wall within six feet of where Grim was standing and brought down probably a ton of débris, bounded off and struck the far wall, but it was too dark to see how much damage it did over there. Then the candle went out, but we could see the airship—a black blot moving against starlight—acting something like a fish that has not yet struck but feels the first discomfort of a baited hook. It was either damaged, or else the man in the bearskin did not fully understand the controls.

"This way," Grim said then. "Quickly—quietly!"

He led us to the opening through which he had recently followed Dorje; he was just visible against the night sky at the shed's open end. In the darkness on the far side there were sounds of trouble, as if the airship hurt several men when it crashed the far wall. Stones were being shifted. There was some one groaning. Grim led through a doorway and along a passage, pausing at the far end and Chullunder Ghose said:

"They are after us! I heard—Krishna! my gooseflesh tells me, too, that men went to the opening we just came out of!"

Grim shut an iron door and bolted it. It was darker then than doom; it felt solid; but Grim struck a match.

"Where's Dorje?" Jeff asked.

"I don't know."

"Where's Vasantasena?"

"I don't know."

"Lord God! We've a fat chance!"

"I came back to save you fellows. That cockney is a man who escaped from prison fifteen years ago; he was awaiting trial for desertion and murder. He's as tough as they make 'em. When I saw he was shamming hurt I drove the knife into the dead man's body. Then I whispered to the cockney to take the airship out and wait for us. There's a chance in fifty that he'll do that. I believe it was he who put the light out—cut off a magnetic field and released the ship's nose from that ball at the end of the shed. But he's a bad egg. We can't depend on him. He may go over to the *babus*, and we've got to beat that outfit before daylight."

Some one shook the iron door. Grim paused, listened, then cautiously went on speaking:

"They won't try to force that without Dorje's orders. He's still master of this corner of the buildings. I hope he already knows that airship has gone, and that he thinks we got away in it."

He struck another match and looked at each of us. The *soma* had enlarged his eyes in some way, but he seemed unexcited—more calm than ever. He stepped closer to us and continued:

"He has sent Vasantasena with a message to his women. I don't know how many they are, or where they are, but he appears to count on them. I don't know what the message is, or what its purpose is. But he was feeling confident again, and when he had sent her with the message he boasted to me that he had ordered all of you killed. I told him he had broken faith. He tried to kill me but I struck first. Then he ran one way, I the other to save you fellows and to make him think I had escaped."

"For God's sake, why didn't you kill him?" Jeff asked.

"Because I need his help to wreck his whole works. Wreck them and his whole campaign goes to pieces." Grim's voice had grown angrier.

"He'll be on the *qui vive* now," said Jeff.

"He was that already. We've a better chance as things are. And I think I shook him badly. He may be a bit dazed. Otherwise, why should he run? Our first job is to wreck his plant, then kill—don't hesitate. Kill any one but Dorje. Wreck his bugs' nest. Him we kill last."

CHAPTER XLI

"Jimgrim."

GRIM led through utter darkness until we found an open door into a passage lined with cell doors and lighted by one oil lamp. We knew then we were in a monastery. At the far end the passage turned a corner. Near the middle of the passage was a Tibetan stairway, which consists of a single wooden upright with cross-pieces nailed to it. We took that and climbed into a room that had a door which opened on a long roof with a waist high parapet. There was a setback and the building went one floor higher, Tibetan in every line, with overhanging semi-Chinese eaves. The undressed stone wall was vaguely blue with light reflected from below where the breast shaped ovens were with their long slots, like gashes in Halloween pumpkins, near the bottom of each of the thirty or forty, or perhaps more. I had no time to count them.

We walked to the eastern end of the long roof, where it jutted out and we could see the full length of the south wall. Then we saw the airship, hardly a thousand feet up and behaving curiously; slowly, going forward and then backward; twice, when it swayed beam on to the worrying wind, it seemed almost to roll over, but it was only a shadow against the stars and very difficult to observe. Chullunder Ghose spoke:

"*Dekko!* I see him, sahibs!"

"Shushh!"

Grim had seen him already. There was a balcony above a main gate in the middle of the south wall. Dorje stood there, staring at the airship. Even as a shadow amid shadows he was unmistakable, with those spidery legs, and his big head, and his hands behind him.

"Let us hope he thinks we're up there in the ship."

Grim led us back along the roof and we stood for several minutes staring at the macabre scene to westward, trying to map it in our minds. It was unintelligible —an inferno—formless shadows made bewildering by cold blue lights. At measured intervals a stream of men, who looked like monks in single file, each carrying something heavy on his shoulders, passed near enough to one of the blue lights to be vaguely visible. Some one, somewhere, blew a *radong* that boomed like a fog bound steamer whistle; that was followed almost instantly by a crash like the noise of iron ore being loaded, and blue flame leaped from a dark half acre on the far side of an embankment. But that flare only confused the shadows more than ever, although I did see what looked like a long street of mud built dwellings, and there was a glimpse for a moment of hundreds of men scurrying like ants in a broken ant hill.

I had glimpsed, too, a huge, black, shapeless building, blind walled on the outside, with slot-like windows pouring blue light into a maze of courtyards.

"I wonder where they make, or store that poison gas," said Grim. "They don't make electricity. Of course, no one ever makes it. But these men—so says Dorje—make an alloy that collects it. If I could make that flow into their store of thunderbolts—but where is it?"

"We made a mistake," said Jeff, "in letting Baltis go. She might have told us."

"She was the only chance we had," said Grim, "to keep that airship somewhere near us as a possible line of retreat."

Chullunder Ghose sighed resignedly.

"Retreat? We are all dead men. And I am so hungry I jolly well don't give a damn! Let us kiss ourselves goodby to hope, and act like madmen; that is only sane course. Sanity is madness; madness sanity. To hell with common sense. I say, let us be desperate."

"That is my job," Grim answered. "Yours is to do as I tell you. I take first crack at it. If I succeed, you fellows do your fighting damnedest to get home alive. If I fail, Jeff carries on. And if Jeff fails, Crosby carries on. If Crosby fails, Chullunder Ghose, it's your turn; and if you succeed, then you obey my

orders and get home alive if possible."

He leaned over the parapet—peered into the darkness—stiffened.

"Yes," he said, "I see her." But how he knew it was Vasantasena is a mystery; the rest of us had glimpsed a shadow flitting amid shadows. "Get that ladder, some one."

JEFF and I dragged up the Tibetan stairway, lowered it over the parapet—dropped it. Luckily it fell as we intended. Then we lowered Grim by the arms and the ladder fell with him when he was halfway down.

"All right," he called up, and we heard him set the ladder back against the wall, rooting it firmly.

But the ladder had made a noise. A wooden window shutter opened and a man came stealthily along the roof with a sword in his hand and a round shield on his left arm. We three ducked into the shadow of the parapet, but he had seen us. I suppose that roof was a forbidden zone—perhaps a place where monks resorted to escape routine. At any rate, he came on like a monitor pursuing small boys. Jeff stepped out to meet him.

The man circled around Jeff, flourishing his weapon, until his back was toward the parapet. Then I, too, stepped out of the shadow, so that he took his eyes off Jeff for half a second—and Jeff's fist shot home. I think that fellow broke his back against the parapet, but Jeff's second blow toppled him over; and at last we had a weapon—one between three of us. Jeff kept it.

Then we heard Grim climbing, speaking in a low voice as he came up the ladder. But when we leaned over the parapet and reached down for his arms Vasantasena gripped our hands. Grim followed her. Vasantasena faced and stared at us without a trace of her former reserve. That barrier was down. She had no fear.

She began to speak in hard, vibrating whispers to Chullunder Ghose. Grim broke her news to us:

"His women are all dead. Killed by his *babus*, as he calls them. Gassed. They were Dorje's spy system. He had them here, there, everywhere; but they met as a matter of routine in a central place she calls the *bibi-kana*. They were trapped in there."

"She says," said Chullunder Ghose, "is this a war on women? First my women—and now his. I also am a woman. It is my war."

Grim put a hand on her shoulder. I expected her to throw it off indignantly. But they had both drunk *soma*. They were neither of them any longer bound by unessentials. Jeff and I felt like outsiders, and Chullunder Ghose came close to us.

Grim hardly noticed us. He kept his arm around Vasantasena, talking to her in a low voice. They led, we followed, through the window that the swordsman had left open, Jeff pausing there a moment to remove the shutter from its hinges and leave open a line of retreat. Long, lamplit corridors. Cell doors. Great gloomy rooms, some occupied, some empty.

Men like medieval monks in shabby brown cloaks, who seemed to take for granted we were Dorje's men—who else could we have been?—looked up from their work. They appeared to be measuring liquid, drop by drop, into tiny phials and there was a nauseating smell—not much of it, but enough to suggest an unwashed morgue. A burly ruffian with daggers at his waist came out of a door and blocked our passage for a moment, but Vasantasena knew a word that passed us instantly.

NO GUARDS in front of Dorje's room. There was a man inside who opened at Vasantasena's knock. It was a big room hung with Oriental rugs, warmed by two braziers, lighted by oil lamps. At the far end was a dais, beneath a canopy. A sick man lay on it—a Chinese, so old and feeble that he was hardly more than skin and bone, although his eyes were like a child's, alight with mischievous intelligence. He looked up once, then took no further notice of us; he

was studying a gold plate, eight inches by ten, and an eighth of an inch thick, inscribed with characters that no one to whom I have shown it has been able to read. In fact, no scientists believe it is an ancient plate, it looks so new, but they are puzzled by the purity of the metal; they appear to think I made the plate myself, and that the characters are nonsense that I etched into the gold in order to create a sensation. It is the only loot I took from Dorje's palace—unless food is loot, and it was not I who took that.

They were packing up food in a room at the back of the dais. Dorje watched them. Stuff like German sausage, highly concentrated—stuff that in infinitesimal quantities conserves strength, even at enormous altitudes.

"Take some," said Grim, with one glance at us.

Then Dorje turned and stared; and any one could tell what ailed him. He craved *soma*. He was waiting for it. Those monks in gloomy rooms were measuring the drops that should be mixed into the final compound. There was a table, near the dais, spread with glass tubes and a scale with a set of fractional weights; there was also a heavy glass flask.

Dorje was almost speechless. Raw edged nerves were irritating him until he had no will remaining to be brought to bear on any problem but his need of the drug that had dropped in the marshes of Koko-nor. He hardly knew who Grim was.

"Making ready to bolt?" Grim asked him.

I believe it was the English words that rallied his will power. The effort to understand them rallied memory, and memory supported will. He became furious.

"Where'sh my ship?"

"Gone," Grim answered. "Where are your *babus*?"

Ten or twelve words Dorje spoke then, in a language that I don't know. But Grim understood him. Grim spoke English; I suppose he wished us to follow the conversation.

"Yes. I promised. I am your ally until your *babus* are defeated."

Dorje answered him in the other language. Grim replied:

"Better make haste. Do you wish them to steal your thunder?"

Rage then. The rage of a maniac intellect that knows its slaves have stolen what it built. A hurricane of words. His spidery legs trembled. He turned on the Chinese—struck him with a bronze rod that was used for stirring charcoal in the brazier; and the yellow man died like a flame that has burned its last drop of oil. Another hurricane of words. Grim answered him.

"That is talk. If I am to destroy them, I will not wait until *soma* is brewed. I don't need it. I am not interested in a plan to rebuild all this elsewhere. Tell me where the switch is."

Dorje hesitated.

"Jeff—you kill him!"

Jeff stepped forward. Dorje backed away in front of him. He went into a panic. He began to jibber. Grim restrained Jeff with a raised hand.

"Where is the switch?"

Three monks came in with bottles in their hands and Dorje came out of his panic like a felon who has been reprieved. The monks set down the bottles on the table and retired.

"You may mix that afterward," said Grim. "Where is the switch?"

Dorje spoke to Vasantasena, but she stood motionless. She and Grim were companions now. She would make no move unless he made it with her. Dorje lost patience. He spoke to Grim in English.

"I told her. She knowsh where that ish. Let her show you."

"Yes," said Grim. "But the agreement is that you and I shall work together until there is an end of all your *babus*. Jeff, give me one of those bottles."

Jeff strode to the table and brought one. Grim passed it to Vasantasena:

"You may have this after I have seen that switch. And if you get back here alive, you may then mix all the *soma* that you care to. Meanwhile, Jeff—you kill him if he wastes another minute."

Dorje—tigerish new cunning in his eyes, and lees of will power succoring his lean legs—started for the door. We all followed, Grim and Vasantasena leading, and Chullunder Ghose came hurrying from the room behind the dais, munching something; he had a load of the stuff that looked like German sausage. I picked up the gold plate that the Chinese had let fall when he died of Dorje's blow with a bronze rod.

Three times, I think, Dorje planned to summon help; he hesitated as we passed the doors of cells where men iike monks were working. But Jeff, with that sword in his hand, was too near. Dorje had to keep on leading until we reached the window with the shutter taken off its hinges. Dorje would have led on down the corridor, where probably there was a surprise in store for us, had not Vasantasena spoken.

"This is the shortest way," said Grim; and Dorje stepped out through the window.

We could see the airship, like a smudge of hazy opal-gray against the starlit sky. It seemed not to be moving.

Dorje led along the roof toward the northern end. Grim spoke. Vasantasena nodded.

"Wait!" Grim commanded.

DORJE faced about and stared. Grim took Jeff's sword. There was a buttress near us; it supported the wall of the setback. With the sword Grim signed to Dorje to back into the corner it offered. He believed he was about to die then and he did not like it. But Grim faced us.

"You fellows go now. This is my job."

"Lead along," said Jeff. "We're coming."

Grim looked hard at him. I think he may have wished to thank Jeff for his loyalty; but it would have been unlike Grim to say half what he meant.

"D'you want my place?" he asked. "I'll give you anything you care to claim."

Jeff cut in on him—

"Goodby, old man."

They shook hands and only four more words were exchanged between those two. I felt I had no right to speak when Jeff was silent; so I shook hands with Grim and said nothing. Grim turned toward Chullunder Ghose and held his hand out.

"Jimmy sahib, this *babu*—" his voice broke. "Jimmy, this *babu* will carry on, because—"

"I understand you. Goodby, old man. Be good to him, Jeff. Keep your eye on the ball, that's all there is to it."

Grim shoved him away.

"And now you chaps, if I should pull this off, get back to India. If you can take that airship, perhaps science will forgive us if we wreck the rest." He met Jeff's eyes again. "Get as far away as possible, as quickly as you can, then wait and have a crack at it if I fail." Jeff turned away.

We made no attempt to persuade Vasantasena to come away with us; she would no more have come than a Hindu widow of a hundred years ago would have accepted a reprieve from *suttee*. It would have been an insult to suggest it to her.

I lowered Jeff over the wall until his feet were on the ladder—then the *babu*—and Vasantasena lowered me, but she ignored my goodby. At the bottom we ran in the direction of the airship—past the hangar—out through freezing shadows between low alluvial dunes, until Chullunder Ghose was winded and we had to wait for him. He lay down, panting. Then we all three stared back at the roof where we had left Grim.

We could see them—three black shadows silhouetted by the blue light, at the far end of the long wall. They were fighting. Grim had Dorje in his arms. He had carried him that far, struggling like a windmill. He carried him out of sight around the corner while we watched.

Jeff spoke.

"Grim may fail yet. Better wait here. I'm next."

I quoted Grim—

"As far away as possible, as quickly as you can!"

"All right. Let's wait a mile away."

We were less than a mile away; our backs were turned, and we were towing along the *babu* at a steady jog between us, when the earth shook. We were shaken off our feet. Seconds before sound reached us every fragment of Dorje's monastery and all its suburbs blew up in an incandescent splendor. It was shot with spears of flame that resembled lightning. Clouds of the stored up poison gas rolled upward and shone like opal and mother-of-pearl as they were rent apart by hundreds of explosions underneath them. Then the thunder of it reached us, and a blast of hot wind drove us to take cover behind the shoulder of a dune. Huge lumps of masonry fell fifty yards away. Then silence; and when we crawled up on the dune there was only a crimson furnace, shot with green and indigo, where Dorje's citadel had been, and where Grim went with Vasantasena to their chosen death.

"I hope," said Jeff, "I hope Jim understood. Do you think that *soma* had dulled his feelings?"

"It had sharpened them," I answered.

Then the airship came. It flew low, slowly, like a big fish looking for its prey. We pulled off coats and waved them from the summit of the sand dune. We were seen—or I think we were seen. It circled us once. It came lower, within fifty yards of us. Then suddenly it turned and vanished northward. There were no lights, and it showed no signal.

"To the moon!" said Chullunder Ghose. "I hope they make it. In previous incarnation she was doubtless somebody important on the moon! However, self was D'Artagnan! We have Tibet to cross—by heaven on flat feet! We have Jimmy Jimgrim's orders to return to India. And there is no more Jimmy Jimgrim? Let us give the lie to that by getting there, by God, and proving to ourselves that Jimmy knew his onions! We were *his* friends. Dammit—Rammy sahib, you're next; I elect you leader! There, the south is that way. Lead on before I—" But he did. He could not help himself. Jeff broke next, and then I did.

Arm in arm together, we three turned our backs on Jimgrim's funeral pyre and started on the bitterest, most melancholy trail there is. There was a wind that howled behind us from the Kwen-Lun ranges; and the leagues of the Roof of the World stretched out in front of us in darkness made more dreary by the contrast of the stars. That night we built a cairn beside the swamps of Koko-nor. There is a legend on it; Jeff did that, and broke his pocketknife by using it on the stone. One word. A rather good man's name; no date; no comments; simply the inscription: JIMGRIM.

THE END

A Story of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police

NORTH BOUNTY

By A. DeHERRIES SMITH

"DAMN those wolf hunters and their complaints!" Corporal Chris Carver fumed as he strode across the trading post floor, toward the frosted window.

A score of amused eyes followed the tall Mountie's figure. They ran in mute speculation from the man's tensed face to the blue, official envelop in his hand.

An expectant rustle came from the group squatted about the Quebec heater's glowing belly. Grins dawned and spread. One moccasin shod foot kicked another in appreciation of the corporal's annoyance.

"Some guy raisin' hell with the government wolfers agin, Chris?" a throaty voice came out of the gloom. "You sure has your troubles protectin' them poor fellers, eh?"

"What the blazes has it got to do with you?"

Carver flung about on one heel, gray eyes glinting. The shuffling stopped instantly.

"Crusty, ain't you?" Mike Modin queried, his voice offended. "Ast you a civil question," he added.

"Well, keep your questions to yourself," Carver retorted. "I came down here to get my mail, not to indulge in a debate. Pick on some one else."

Modin shrugged his shoulders under a dirty caribou skin *capote*, questioning the Mountie's lack of courtesy by a quick glance at the other men. Several of them signified their distaste for the scarlet jacketed figure by spitting on the pole floor. Silence came again, broken only by the rustling of the sheet Carver was perusing.

A tree cracked in the frost behind the trading post, with a pistol-like report. The huskies hitched to the sleds outside whined with the cold. One of the dogs got to his feet, shook his shaggy coat, and filled the air with a sudden jangle of back bells.

Corporal Carver heard none of these things. His narrowed eyes had again reached midway down the typewritten sheet. They halted and read the maddening paragraphs for the fourth time.

> As you have been previously informed, it is of the utmost importance that the government wolf hunters are not interfered with.
>
> Consequent upon this, unless the wolf packs are destroyed the caribou herds will suffer from their depredations. It must be also clear to you that unless the Indians are able to obtain the caribou for food that the natives will starve, as occurred in 1928.
>
> I regret to state that fresh complaints have been received from Mr. Anton Kerl, regarding your handling of the matter. Failing immediate and satisfactory action I shall be forced to recall you to headquarters and substitute another officer—

"Fine," the corporal said to himself, bitterly. "You squat there in a steam heated office, scraping the varnish off the desk with your spurs, and amuse yourself by bawling me out. All right, Inspector, I'll take you on. I'll show you that no one up here can put anything over the Windigo detachment."

Modin's little eyes were bright with amusement when the Mountie rammed the letter back into his tunic pocket. Sheltered by the post's gloom, the trapper's gaze again went to Carver's long frame, outlined by the faint light from the window.

The corporal was no more than twenty-five, the trapper told himself. That wind tanned face, tight lips and determined jaw made him seem older, though. He was a tough guy; stringy, but with trail hardened muscles underneath that uniform. Beat all how these cops liked to keep themselves dolled up, too. Every button was shining as if he were on duty in the city. Why, you could even see that he had washed that yellow stripe on his riding breeches, and he seemed to have a pair of new moccasins every week.

Modin grinned again, when Carver stamped across the floor and disappeared through the doorway in a billow of frost fog.

The trapper got to his feet, stretched lazily and laughed. He bulked bear-like in the half light; a big man, bigger by reason of loose fitting, fringed deerskin trousers, the clumsy *capote*, and a rubbed muskrat cap crammed down on his untidy, graying hair. Covered by a three months' winter stubble, the man's face was indefinite, but lighted by deeply set brown eyes, never at rest.

Modin paced back and forth with short strides. Suddenly, with a curt "S'long" to the group at the heater, he too passed out into the stabbing cold.

The man kicked the huskies to their feet, and reached for the whip. Standing poised behind the cariole, his eyes went to the whitewashed walls of the police post, gleaming against a background of blue-black spruce timber.

"Well, *au revoir*, old-timer," the trapper called to the detachment building's frost covered windows. "We meets agin, like the feller said in the book. You foller my trail, Chris, an' you'll meet Old Man Trouble!"

Modin was chuckling to himself as he flung the whip, and went off in a smother of powdery snow, dogs howling.

THE FIVE gray police huskies were fresh and eager for the trail. That suited Carver, but annoyance as well as anxiety was stamped on the corporal's face as he ran behind the team.

Anton Kerl's complaint about the interference with the government wolf hunters was justified, he knew. He'd either have to straighten the thing out this time or sure enough the inspector would have the hooks into him. Recalled to H. Q.! Hell! Reeve knew nothing of conditions in the North, and explanations would be useless. It was a case of get results or get out.

Constable Plum Duff's thickset frame was jogging ahead of the eager dogs, holding them down to a respectable gait. Carver watched the little man's short legs in violent motion and grinned to himself. Action—that was better than loafing around the post, anyhow.

Hours passed, broken only by the tinkle of the bells, the creaking of the cariole and the two men's breathing. Already the huskies were coated with frozen breath. Little puffs of fog were caught and whirled back from their red mouths. The men too left a trail of white on the air behind them.

They halted at noon and made tea after the Northern mode, while the dogs curled up in the snow and snoozed.

"I wish them shooters were as far in hell as they're outa it," Duff said fervently, swallowing the contents of a tin pannikin. "Why in blazes can't they leave the wolves to the wolfers? There's plenty of caribou. The whole Barren Lands is lousy with deer."

"Spite, I guess," Carver replied, glancing across at his comrade's round, freckled face. "Anyhow the wolfers are government servants and they've got to be protected. Some one has it in for Kerl and they're shooting the wolves so that he won't get the thirty dollars bounty on each scalp taken. Another of these blasted trappers' wars. That's the way I figure it. We'll break camp. Get the dogs up."

They started again, driving over the barren rock ridges, through gravelly valleys, and in and out between clumps of wind twisted spruce trees.

Carver waited longer than usual to make camp that evening. He pulled into a clump of dwarfed trees just as the sun was disappearing behind the western ridges.

The men were accustomed to working together. In less time than it would take a greenhorn to look about him a fire was lighted. The huskies squatted about the red flames in an expectant circle, eyeing the fish that Duff was thawing out for them. Their pointed ears were pricked, the long mouths slavered.

Supper over, the dishes were scoured with dry snow and twigs. Then the sleeping bags were arranged on places scraped clear of snow. The two men lay down, pipes going, the parka hoods still pulled over their heads.

A deep growl from Yarak, the team leader, brought Carver out of a doze. He threw back the *parka* hood and sat up. The huskie was standing stiff legged on the other side of the fire, the hackles rising along his shaggy neck.

Another growl and a sharp yelp brought the four other dogs leaping upright. All five faced the timber screen behind the camp; long ears pricked, bushy tails stiffened.

"Somethin' in there," Duff hazarded sleepily. "Likely a deer. Come here, you pests!" he called to the huskies when Yarak made as though to trot over to the timber.

"*Ota! Ota!*" Carver commanded in Cree. "Here!"

He was too late. Curiosity was uppermost in the team's wolfish minds. Heedless of the order, the four other dogs followed Yarak at a lope.

"Get after 'em!" the corporal yelled at Duff.

He struggled out of his sleeping bag, jerked the service revolver out of his holster and plunged through the snow toward the trees.

Yarak's bushy tail was disappearing

behind a clump of willows when Carver panted across the snow and reached the trees' deeper shadows. Now he could see nothing.

"When I gets my maulers on those pooches, I'll—"

"Shut up!" Carver broke in on the other man. "Listen!"

The corporal gripped the constable's sleeve. Holding down their panting breaths, they stood motionless in the snow. All at once a new note was added to the chorus of whines coming from the timber. Carver swore and plunged into the brush, Duff at his heels.

Five minutes of blind struggling through the willows, of crashing into trees, followed. Then all at once Carver sensed they had reached a hollow or a clearing of some kind. He stopped and lighted a match.

By the tiny yellow flame, both Mounties saw the five dogs in the center of a little clearing just ahead of them. The huskies were rolling about in the snow, snarling, biting at their bellies. One was already dead. Here and there lumps of raw meat dotted the snow.

Carver, his face down, turned about to stare at Duff by the light of another match.

"Poisoned, every damn one of 'em. Strychnine. Now, who the blazes—

"Listen!" Carver jerked out, cutting his own speech short.

Faint sounds filtered through the frosted woods, only distinguishable now and then above the dying dogs' whimperings. There came the crackle of frozen brush as a body made a hurried passage away from the glade.

"No use trying to follow in the dark," Carver said through clenched teeth. "They're getting after us early in the game, Plum. By the Lord, I don't mind them trying to out me, but this thing of poisoning the dogs is going to be paid for! Poor old Yarak. Damn it, I raised him from a pup. I suppose they figured we'd turn back; wouldn't try to make Kerl's on foot. Well, no use sticking around here. Back to the camp."

Arrived at the fire once more, Carver silently commenced to make ready for a pack trip. He rolled up his sleeping bag and stowed it in the cariole. Then he made a pack out of a single blanket, filling it with the barest necessities in the way of food. That done, he swung the pack up on his shoulders, waiting until Duff had completed a similar job. Snow was kicked over the fire.

"Sorry, Plum," the corporal apologized. "This means an all night hike. We've got to make time. All hell wouldn't stop me now. Mush!"

Duff hastily bit a man's sized chew from his plug, hitched his pack and followed.

THE THIRD night out found Carver and Duff lying back to back on a bed of spruce boughs laid on the scraped ground. They were wrapped tightly together with the two blankets, moccasined feet almost in the fire's warm ashes.

Carver awoke to find that the sky was graying and that a new day had come. He shivered and crowded back against Duff's warm body. For several minutes he lay thus, trying to persuade himself that he was entitled to one night's sleep out of three.

All at once the corporal jumped up, and Plum mumbled—

"For Pete's sake, lie still, can't you?"

Carver took no notice of the complaint. A faint, distance mellowed tinkle was borne on his ears. Despite the intense cold he threw the parka hood back from his head, and stepped away from the fire.

"Dog team?" Duff's voice came from behind. Still wrapped in the blankets, Duff padded over to Carver.

Carver made no reply. His narrowed eyes were fixed on five black specks trotting along a distant rock ridge. Behind the team was an upright figure. All six were clear against the skyline.

Duff heard Carver's oath when the team disappeared into the next valley and the corporal turned back to the fire.

"Goin' to follow that guy's trail, eh?" Duff suggested. Carver snarled some-

thing the other man could not catch, and commenced hasty breakfast preparations. He had been long enough in the North to know that without proper food to sustain them both they would not travel far in that nerve sapping air.

Snow was melted for tea, bacon fried, and a bannock made. After eating without words, the Mounties made up their packs and headed due east into the teeth of the rising wind.

The cold sun rose to its zenith, sparkling on the dry snow, and commenced to lower again. Still the two trudged on silently. Time and again Duff's shorter legs caused him to drop behind. Carver did not wait for him; did not appear to noticed that his comrade was not in his place. Plum was forced to run to regain his position. Now he was too tired to swear or chew tobacco.

The sun was dipping behind the rock ridges and the night mists were gathering, when a grunt from Carver brought Duff's head up. The corporal had stopped and was staring down into a valley at his feet.

About half a mile away the rocky opening gave way to a miniature forest of dwarfed timber that ran on as far as they could see. A cabin was placed at the edge of the woods. A thin column of wood smoke was going up into the raw air from a mud and rock chimney.

"The wolf hunters' place," Carver called back. "Come on."

They slid down the wind swept rocks and wallowed through the deeper snows in the valley bottom. It was darker there and by the time they had reached the cabin a faint glimmer of yellow light was showing through one of the frosted windows.

There was still enough light for the corporal to see that the wolf hunters were doing well, in spite of their complaints. Scores of gray wolf skins, stretched on frames, were hung on a pole between two trees. They reminded the Mountie of the racks of clothing in a men's wear store.

Apparently the wolfers were satisfied with the way things were going, too. A heavy voice boomed out tunelessly through the flimsy door, made of packing case lids.

The voice stopped suddenly when the Mountie called "Hello!", shoved the door open and went in. He was followed by Duff and a billow of frost fog.

There was only one man in the cabin. Anton Kerl had a green wolf skin stretched on the table and was in the act of scraping it when the door opened. He jumped upright, the hunting knife gripped tightly, facing the two visitors with but little indication of welcome on his face.

For a long moment the corporal and the wolfer sized up each other. There was both surprise and annoyance stamped on Kerl's narrow face and hooded eyes. They hardened when Carver's gaze surveyed him, and the Mountie's lips curled in disgust at the man's grimy clothing.

"Big, tough and dirty," the corporal said to himself, "and he's sure a sweet housekeeper. I hate to think that we've got to camp here tonight . . ."

"Well, you come at last, eh?" Kerl rumbled in salutation, sticking the knife upright in the table. "Glad of it. I'm tellin' the world I'm about fed up with these cursed—"

"There are fresh sled tracks down the valley, and we saw a musher pass along the ridges this morning", Carver broke in. "Who was it?"

"I ain't seen no team," Kerl snapped, eyeing the corporal, and taking another reef in his loosely belted trousers. "Ain't mine, anyhow. My dogs is over to the Snowdrift River, after another load of wolf skins."

"Uh-huh," the corporal grunted.

He swung out of his pack, stripped his parka, and went over to the heater to thaw out.

"How come you ain't got no dogs? Run wild after a caribou?" Kerl asked, a sudden interest dawning in his eyes.

"No," the Mountie retorted. "We like exercise."

"Yeah?"

"Got to stay here tonight. You'll be paid for it," Carver announced. "Now

what about the trouble you're having?"

"Plenty," Kerl snapped out. "And looka here; it's up to you to do somethin' this time. Don't want no more free advice, see? When the government made me wolf hunter up here I was give all the territory south of the Thelon River. You know that. Well, I'm killin' off the wolves an' it's up to you to see that I gets a show. If the wolves ain't bumped off they feeds on the caribou herds, an' then the Injun starves. Howsomever, them fools ain't got enough brains to savvy that."

"All right," Carver replied, his voice icy. "You're a government servant. I'll see that you're protected. But look here, Kerl, I'm not taking any back chat from you or from any of your kind. You're going to be civil or I'll knock some civility into your thick head—red jacket or no red jacket. Get that?"

Kerl's wide mouth twisted into a scornful smile. His eyes glittered at this challenge and the muscles ridged up along his great, hairy arms. The wolf hunter contented himself with a contemptuous grunt, however.

"Who is it that's causing the rumpus, and where are they located?" the Mountie asked.

"Itamook's band of Chipewyans," Kerl said surlily. "They's the worst. Camped out on the forks of the Yellowknife and the Big Bear. Plenty caribou there so they don't need to hunt wolves."

"I'll go after them in the morning," Carver promised. "Meantime bring in the wolf skins and I'll mark them and sign your bounty papers . . . No, we've got our own grub."

The wolfer nodded, pulled on his parka and went out.

"She's sure a choice dive," Plum grumbled as his eyes ran over the cabin's smoky walls, Kerl's untidy bunk and the still unwashed dishes thrown into a box cupboard. "But the guy's makin' money," he added. "You gotta give him credit for that. Gets thirty bucks bounty on each wolf, besides another ten or fifteen for the skin. Makes more in a day than I do in six months. Boy, when I get outa this uniform!"

Duff made a supper of bannock and bacon, cooked in the police frying pan. Then the two Mounties sat on the pole bench against the wall and smoked, while Kerl carried in armfuls of wolf skins and threw them on the floor.

With Plum acting the part of clerk, Carver went over the long furred skins. He slit the ears of each animal, betokening that the government bounty had been recorded, while Duff noted it down.

"Two hundred and three skins," Carver called when he had totaled the figures and signed the bounty record. "You're doing well, Kerl. Another month of winter, too."

The wolfer offered no reply. He piled the skins in a heap against the wall. Then he kicked off his slipper moccasins and climbed into the bunk, to lie there smoking and staring up at the lantern's smoky glow.

"Guess we'll roll in too," Carver suggested.

Plum scraped holes for their hips in the hard packed earth, and spread the two blankets. Carver's preparations for slumber consisted in putting on dry socks, and taking off his revolver belt, which he laid on the ground beside him. Then, as before, the two Mounties rolled in, back to back.

"WELL, that's got me shoved in the corner!"

Duff repeated the same phrase he had muttered a hundred times since the two Mounties had left the Chipewyan Indians' encampment and had headed back for Kerl's cabin.

Carver, who was striding ahead of the other man, only nodded. He was just about ready to boil over. They had not been able to get anything out of the Indians except noncommittal grunts. Even old Itamook, the chief, would say nothing. He just sat there, glowering at the fire in the center of his teepee and pulling at the stem of his soapstone pipe with withered lips.

"Here, that's not fair—runnin'," Duff yelled from behind, when Carver unconsciously quickened his stride.

"Shake it up," the corporal ordered, halting on the crest of a rock ridge. "I'm in a hurry, Plum. Only a few miles to Kerl's now, and you've got to step on it."

Duff looked up an hour later to discover that his comrade had disappeared. He broke into a run, following the corporal's trail. He came to the crest of another of those endless rock ridges, and as he did so a satisfied grin overspread his round face.

The corporal was headed for the valley below. Heedless of the danger involved, he leaped from one slippery rock to another, sliding down the open spaces between in a smother of loose snow.

"Home sweet home," Duff said happily to himself, when his eyes made out the dun brown shape of Kerl's cabin under the trees.

"Dogs!" the little man added in surprise, when a chorus of wolfish howls floated out on the thin air in challenge of the corporal's arrival.

Two men came briefly to the cabin door to greet Carver. Neither took any notice of the huskies which came straight at the Mountie in a savage wave of flattened ears and bared fangs.

"Get! Hah, you brutes, mush!" Carver threatened without halting his stride.

The pack leader, a great tawny dog, rushed forward. He leaped at the corporal's extended left hand—just a split second after the right, grasping a heavy Colt, crashed down on the triangular head.

The brute rolled sidewise, yelping. With unerring precision the wolf minds of his mates told them that here was something wounded and ready for the killing. Without halting their rush, the other dogs swirled aside and leaped on their fallen comrade.

The Mountie knew huskies. With a single glance at the mêlée of flagging tails and darting heads, he sidestepped the tearing brutes, holstered his gun and went on.

"Hell! What are *you* doing here?"

Carver put the question from where he stood, filling the doorway with his bulk. He stared into the cabin, accustoming his eyes to the gloom.

"Hey, what you think this is—California? Shut the damn door," Kerl's gruff tones responded. "Why, sure he's here. Me an' Modin is partners in the wolfin'. He just brung in my pelts from the Snowdrift."

The Mountie caught the glances that passed from one wolf hunter to the other. His lips were tight when he stepped into the cabin, and placed his back to the wall.

"Well, how about them Itamook *nitchies?*" Kerl demanded. "You read the riot act to 'em about buttin' in on the wolfin', eh?"

"No," Carver admitted. "Couldn't get anything out of them. They're just sitting about the teepees and apparently they're all struck dumb."

"Haw, haw—"

Modin's guffaw of throaty laughter stopped as suddenly as it had commenced. He stared open eyed when the corporal stepped quickly across the cabin. One hand was on the flap of his revolver holster, the index finger of the other was thrust into Kerl's narrow face.

"How comes it that your name was written on two tins of jam and on a sack of flour in Itamook's teepee?" Carver demanded, the finger almost touching Kerl's blunt nose.

"Good for you, Corp," Kerl congratulated the Mountie. "Some dirty slink swiped a bunch of grub outa my cache a week ago. So there's where the stuff landed, eh? By cripes, you're a real cop! When I reports this to headquarters mebbe they'll make you a sergeant." Modin's laugh sounded again.

Carver's eyes narrowed to pin points of light. By an effort he controlled himself. He felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach, and could not hide the disappointment stamped upon his features.

"Well—?" It was Kerl who broke the long silence, his voice humorous and triumphant.

"Get those Snowdrift pelts in. I'll mark them," Carver growled, conscious that his voice was strangely small.

"Fine," Kerl applauded. He shoved the skinning knife to one side, bent down and threw a pile of bloody skins on to the table. "Right here. Ten. Count 'em."

Carver saw Duff's shadow darken the door and heard his whistle of surprise at seeing Modin. The corporal slashed open the ears of the first pelt and tumbled the skin off the table. Three more followed in quick succession.

THE FIFTH pelt was in his fingers and the point of the knife had entered the ear, when a tremor of excitement ran through Carver. His eyes narrowed.

"Ten is correct," the corporal said in an even voice, when he threw the last pelt to the floor and let the sticky knife follow it. "I see the whole thing, now," he added.

"See what?" Kerl queried, head bent forward, brows down.

"I see why those Indians wouldn't talk; why they had your grub supplies," Carver retorted. "In the first place you had the poor fools scared stiff. You probably threatened them that if I got to know what was going on that I'd run them all in. You bought up all their huskies cheap, and converted them into wolves for the bounty! Don't move; you listen to me. Besides that you figured that I'd order Itamook's tribe away from your wolfing territory. Then when another gang of Indians came in after white fox, you'd swindle them out of their dogs, too. It was a slick idea to try and focus my attention on the Indians. Slick, but not slick enough."

"Meanin' that I'm sellin' dog skins to the government for wolf pelts?" Kerl shouted, his voice threatening.

"Exactly," Carver retorted crisply. "That's just what you were doing. What are wolves but wild huskies, anyhow? The same coats, the same pointed ears and bushy tails."

"You don't say?" Kerl mocked the Mountie, his face smiling again. "Well, if you couldn't tell the difference between a dog skin and a wolf pelt before, how comes you can do it now? I says them pelts is wolves, not huskies. Any guy what can tell 'em apart ain't no slouch. Go ahead an' prove it."

"Just what I'm going to do," Carver said. "Probably I'd never have stumbled on it if Modin hadn't—"

Crash!

Quick as a flash Modin upended the table and flung it against Carver's arm, before the Mountie could unholster his gun. The corporal's foot slid on one of the greasy skins. As he fell he heard Kerl's yell and glimpsed Plum's thickset body hurtling across the cabin.

The sound of Duff's moccasin shod feet on the earthen floor was drowned by another yell from Kerl; then came the thud of fists, battering at close quarters.

Then Carver had his own troubles.

Modin followed the table. He aimed one knee at the pit of the corporal's stomach, at the same time reaching out for the knife lying beside the skins.

The trapper's fingers closed over the weapon. He came half upright, desperation showing in his eyes. His lips were drawn back from tobacco yellowed teeth.

With the agility of a lynx, Modin flung himself forward from his knees, the knife hand drawn back. But although still half dazed from his fall, Carver's brain was alert. He wriggled sidewise as the trapper's wiry body slid across him. The right hand shot out and hard fingers gripped Modin's knife wrist. The corporal humped his shoulders, concentrating all his energies on getting that hand down.

A hard knee caught Carver in the middle of the back. Four wildly kicking legs mauled his neck and head. Duff and Kerl, locked together, fell over the two on the floor and rolled across the cabin.

The corporal caught a fleeting glimpse of what was happening. Duff was holding on to Kerl's right arm with one hand, the police frying pan gripped in the other. It whirled up into the air and crashed down on the wolf hunter's head.

A moan of pain welled up to Modin's

lips, when once more Carver sought for the grip that had been loosened by the other men's fall. The trapper jerked the knife arm up. It remained there, poised above the two heads for what seemed an age of time.

Carver felt the wind whistling out of his lungs, sensed the creaking of his muscles, tried in vain to shake away the little trickles of salty sweat that ran down into his eyes.

A sudden upheaval convulsed the two figures. Once more the corporal's shoulders rose and fell.

"My arm!" Modin screamed. "You —you've broken my—"

"Yes, and I'd break the other one, too, only you'll need it to sign a declaration," the corporal panted. "You'll kill no more dogs in the territories. Get over on the bunk."

Carver got up slowly, pulled the trapper erect, half carrying, half dragging him across to the bunk.

"Great stuff in them police fryin' pans," Duff's voice wheezed, as Carver turned about. "He took the count in the first round. Whew!"

"Say, Corporal, about them pelts. Beats me how it was you could tell they was dog skins."

Instead of answering Carver jerked one of the skins off the floor, parted the fur on the ear, thus disclosing one of the small brass tags with which the police dogs were marked.

"Cripes!" Duff exclaimed. "R.C.M.P. tag right enough. L 23."

"Yes; I cut into it when I was slitting the ear," the corporal replied. "Plum, that's poor old Yarak, the best damn team leader in the—"

"My Gawd, I see it now!" the constable exclaimed. "That swine, Modin, poisoned the team an' then he had the infernal gall to bring the skins in here to collect the wolf bounty on 'em. I'll—"

Carver's fingers halted the little man's rush toward the bunk.

"Not now, Plum," he said grimly.

A Living Tomb

By CAPTAIN MANSFIELD

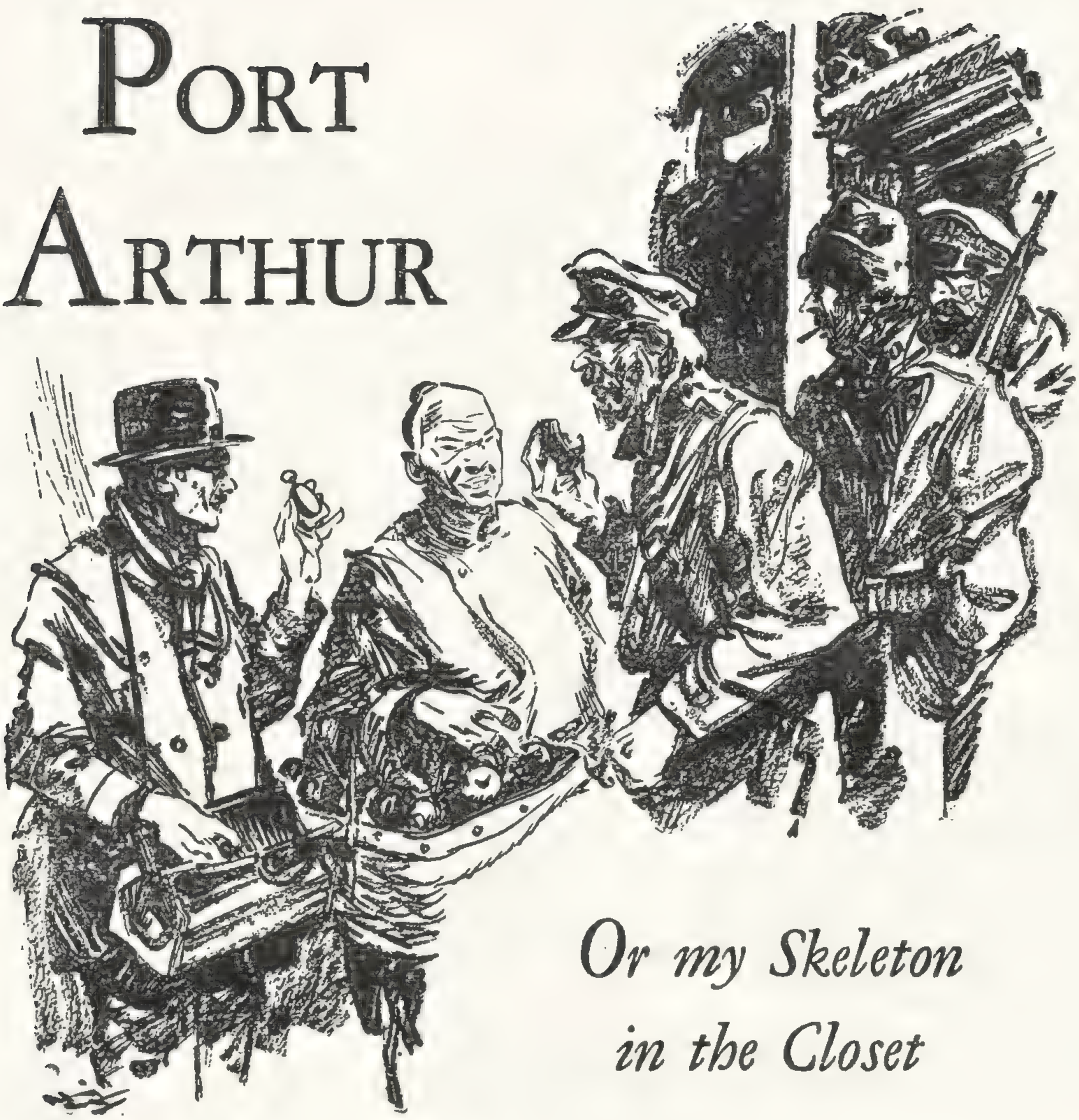
IN A LITTLE town in Indo-China I visited the zoo one day and saw a strange sight. A tiger, beautiful, imperial, silent, sat in his cage gazing at a group of Anamites gyrating before him. There were huge chunks of meat black with blue bottle flies on either side him, but meat seemed not to interest him just then. He was too busy watching the strange antics of the natives, who with waving joss sticks whirled, clapped their hands and mumbled prayers to the tiger.

"Is this some sacred beast?" I asked a guard standing apart.

"Of a surety, no," he replied. "They but worship the tiger because one of their number is within him. He is but lately trapped and one of the poor hunters fell into the pit prepared for the tiger and was eaten by him. A huge price was paid for this animal because he is so lordly, but the poor unfortunate who was eaten paid with his life that his family might have many piastres. See now, these poor ones, his mother, his sisters, his wife and family, mourn the loss of their dear one at the only grave they have."

Perhaps the soul of the departed had taken possession of the tiger, because in spite of his proud beauty the royal one's eyes were the saddest I ever saw in man or beast as they gazed out over the mourners.

Port Arthur



Or my Skeleton in the Closet

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

AFTER a dramatic little incident on the Western plains, where the trigger finger used to dictate the law, I went to Yuma where I sold my horse and whatever else I could spare of my outfit. Later, in San Francisco, with what other little means I could scrape together, I took passage for China on a tramp steamer. I did not know exactly where I was headed, but I certainly was on my way.

At the time of my arrival the Celestial Empire was entering that period of international intrigue which finally led to the Sino-Japanese War. It was not surprising, therefore, that almost immediately after I got there Mr. Evans, one of the acting secretaries of state of the Empire of Korea, took pity on me and, eyeing me sharply through his monocle, gave me the following valuable advice:

"If you want to be successful in China, play a lone game—if possible under an assumed name or one of your family names

by which you are not known; for it is dangerous to know in the Far East things which a foreigner should never know, and more dangerous still to speak about them."

No wonder that Venezuela's secretary of war cabled time and again to Japan trying in vain to find out the real name of a certain Venezuelan army officer who was reported as doing stunts during the first two or three months of the Sino-Japanese War, but suddenly disappeared as if swallowed up by the earth, without leaving even the slightest trace of his whereabouts.

That is why I seldom speak about my adventures around the China Seas—Peking; Seoul; Port Arthur . . . That is also why I suddenly left the Far East to go hunting big game in Alaska during the first week of the month of May, 1904, after our landing at Pi-Tse-Wo, where I was slightly wounded.

Nevertheless, in order to give a sample of the little adventures a man was likely to meet in China at that time, just before the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War, I will relate the following incident which happened to me in the city of Amoy after my first landing in China.

It was after a banquet given by the governor of the province which almost caused my death from indigestion. Not knowing that a Chinese banquet consisted of from one dozen to two dozen courses (some of them rather heavy) I had partaken liberally of the first two courses and, not daring to be impolite, had taken a mouthful of the remaining fifteen or twenty—with the result that that night I saw dragons crawling all over me.

On that occasion I had the honor of meeting a certain foreign consular or diplomatic agent, married to a very attractive lady of Portuguese descent, who had a married sister living in Macao.

While Mr. Matos was away for a few days on some confidential business—all consular and diplomatic business was in those days strictly confidential—Mrs. Matos confided to me with tears in her eyes that because a Portuguese high governmental official, whose advances she had refused, had threatened to expose her, she had been forced to leave Macao in such a hurry that she had forgotten all about a certain package containing private correspondence—love letters, of course—which she had been keeping in a certain drawer, and so forth . . .

She was positive that her sister would hand me the package if I rendered her the service of fetching it for her. And why not? I would not have been a cavalier if I had refused so small a service to so charming a lady.

In Macao I was very well received by Mrs. Matos' sister, Mrs. Dubois. But my visit drew to an end in a way which warranted my ardent desire to return to Amoy as soon as possible. Mrs. Dubois' husband rushed into the house with blood in his eyes, brandishing a six-shooter; in other words, behaving in a way which was anything but polite. Remembering that I had not gone to Macao just for the fun of it, but to render Mrs. Matos a service, and not forgetting either that her package of "private correspondence" was not intended for Portuguese officials to read, I tucked it away in a secret pocket which I had sewn in my riding breeches, bade farewell to the Duboises in a hurry and slipped down a rope into the pitchy darkness of a deserted alley nearby. Thence I proceeded to the harbor, where I boarded a native junk which hastily spread her mat sails and disappeared into the night, silent as a bat.

Only later did I find out through Mr. Evans that Mrs. Matos was not Mrs. Matos; nor Mr. Dubois Mrs. Dubois' husband; nor those letters love letters at all, but very valuable political documents which that band of international crooks had stolen and, not daring to smuggle them out of Macao themselves, they had roped me in for that purpose.

After several similar experiences at Canton, I landed on Christmas Eve, 1903, at Shanghai, where I registered in one of the fashionable hotels. Next morning Mr. Evans came to see me: in fact, he had been expecting me. I was still very green

in those days, so Mr. Evans had not much difficulty in winning me over to his cause, whose nature, however, he was careful not to reveal to me until it was too late for me to back out. He appointed me (I was then twenty-three) confidential and diplomatic agent of the government of Korea of which he was a high official. He also supplied me with the necessary funds and dispatched me immediately to Peking.

There I made myself at home in the Wagon-Lit Hotel and, owing to my European education and the fact that I spoke several languages fluently, I soon got in contact with the various parties whom I had been ordered to sound in regard to how much Yuan-Chi-Kai, the all powerful viceroy of Chihli and future president of China had to do with the preparations for the Sino-Japanese War which was expected to break out any moment.

Those investigations were absolutely necessary in view of the efforts which Russia was making in order to draw China into the forthcoming conflict by proposing to her an alliance similar to the one which a year previously had been entered into by Japan and the British Empire.

The difference between those two alliances was that England's participation in the forthcoming war would not have been of much practical value because England did not at that time, as during the World War, have a fair sized, but only a relatively insignificant regular, army. England would not have been able to land in Manchuria more than fifty or a hundred thousand men at the most—a mere drop in the bucket when compared with the hundreds of thousands of Russian and Japanese soldiers which would be taking part in the impending war; whereas China, by mobilizing her countless hordes of "cannon fodder" (ex-Boxers, bandits and sundry other highbinders) as well as the rest of her army, including the five or six well disciplined and well equipped infantry divisions which Yuan-Chi-Kai was keeping in readiness near the Manchurian frontier, could easily have neutralized England's participation in the war by harassing the British possessions—Hongkong, Wai-Hai-Wai, etc.—and by assisting the Russians in opposing the landing of Japanese troops in Korea and the strategically most important Liaotung Peninsula: the door of Manchuria.

Therefore, a great honor had really been conferred upon me when I was requested to undertake those investigations on which depended to a certain extent the final outcome of the approaching war: investigations which required much tact and a thorough knowledge not only of military strategy but also of the military potentialities of the much abused and grossly underrated Celestial Empire.

One of the main reasons why the Turkish Second and Third Caucasus Armies succeeded in stemming the Muscovite advance on the Eastern Front, during the World War, was because their German and Turkish chiefs of staff had, as I was doing at that time in China, performed some efficient military intelligence work in Russia before the outbreak of the war. The same thing can be said about the Allies, who had also detailed some of their ablest staff officers to do intelligence work in Turkey previous to the World War. If it had not been for the clever work done by Lord Kitchener and the magnificent maps of Syria and Palestine which he drew *secretly* during the six years which he served as a major in the Turkish army, the British expeditionary forces in the Sinai peninsula and in Palestine would have been at a disadvantage notwithstanding their great numerical and technical superiority over the Turkish troops.

To return to China: Realizing the great political and military importance of the mission entrusted to me and overcoming the aversion which I have always felt for military intelligence work, I got busy the minute I arrived at Peking. I did not for a moment lose sight of the dangerous cobweb which the wary viceroy had spun around him. Yuan-Chi was a remarkable character, foxy and cruel.

Previous to the Sino-Japanese War, in 1895-1896, he had acted as Chinese Imperial resident in the Hermit Kingdom of

Korea. Thanks to his great ability he had managed to uphold the waning Chinese suzerainty in that ancient vassal state of the Celestial Empire which the Japanese coveted for many reasons. After the Sino-Japanese War, Yuan-Chi had risen to the highest honors which the dowager empress Tzu-Hsi could bestow on him as a reward for his having thwarted Emperor Kuang-Hsu's *coup d'état* in 1898. As viceroy of Chihli and successor of Li-Hung-Chang, Yuan was doing everything in his power to hinder Japan's ascendency and design to get a foothold in Manchuria—Japan's ultimate aim during the Sino-Japanese War. The real reason why Yuan-Chi was secretly siding with Russia in those days was to antagonize Japan which, owing to its proximity to the Chinese Empire, represented a far greater danger to China's territorial integrity than Russia.

While I kept hustling round in Peking, doing all I could on behalf of Mr. Evans—and through him indirectly also on behalf of the Japanese government with which he was supposed to be secretly allied—I was unwittingly playing with fire without suspecting it. I was utterly ignorant of the terrible mess I had got myself into.

IT WAS during a glorious winter morning, in January 1904, while the sunbeams were drawing iridescent sparks from the snow covered tile roofs of the Red Palace that I got the first inkling of my real danger.

When I mounted my pony that morning to take my habitual ride, I noticed that for some inexplicable reason my Chinese attendant had fastened a raincoat on the back of my saddle. After trotting awhile in the Legation Compound, whistling to myself in happy anticipation of a party to which I had been invited, I swerved off toward the outskirts of the town to enjoy the sight of the seething crowd of peasants pouring into the city with agricultural produce.

While trying to get out of the way of an endless caravan of stolid faced camels which waddled along the road like a string of geese, I ran into a heap of typical Chinese garbage. When I reined in my pony to give the malodorous pyramid a wide berth my attention was attracted by a tiny, almost imperceptible cry. Looking around, with my handkerchief held to my mouth, I discovered the cause of that sound—a two or three day old Chinese baby girl that lay wrapped in a piece of paper on top of the garbage heap. She was wiggling her little pink toes and rubbing her tiny fists. Her poor, naked body, turned purple by the cold, was already attracting the attention of several scavenger dogs which seemed to be waiting only for me to ride away in order to make a dash for it.

Realizing that under those circumstances there was only one thing for me to do, I did it. I got off my horse, wrapped the miserable little tot in my raincoat, rode to the nearest Christian mission, which happened to be a Catholic nuns' institution, and knocked at the door. I can still see the happy and astounded face of the good old mother superior when I handed the infant over to her.

Before I departed from the monastery the mother superior fumbled in her pocket for something which turned out to be the customary handful of copper coins which the missionaries used to pay as a reward for abandoned children. I took one of the coins and kept it as a souvenir, but replaced it immediately with a ten dollar bill which probably helped to save the life of many a little girl like the one I had rescued that morning from the garbage heap.

Though that was not much of an incident it helped me, however, to make the acquaintance of the powerful viceroy of Chihli, Yuan-Chi-Kai, whose spies, as he told me himself afterward, had been following my steps all over Peking since I had arrived there. When I returned to the hotel that evening I found there a note from the viceroy in which he invited me to call on him next day. No reasons were stated.

I noticed how the eyes of my interpreter, Chen, narrowed visibly while he read the note—a sure sign that something was wrong. Chen was an attaché of the ministry of the interior of Korea whom Evans had detailed on duty as my interpreter. He was a bright young fellow and exceptionally well fitted for his job. He was also courageous. After reading the message he turned out the lights—lest Yuan-Chi-Kai's secret service men were spying on us through some half-inch loophole in the walls or ceiling of my room—and whispered into my ear:

"We are done for. The honorable viceroy's executioners are waiting for us."

Early next morning I drove to Yuan-Chi's temporary residence. I was ushered into his office right away. I found him sitting behind a huge black teakwood writing table, apparently busy reading some official letters but in reality watching me carefully from the corner of his eye. Noticing that he paid no attention to me, I took out a cigaret, lighted it and sat comfortably on a chair waiting for his nibs to get through with his work. My nonchalance must have made a favorable impression on the wary old fox for, laying aside his writing brush and drawing a gaudy fan from his pouchy sleeve, he addressed me through his spectacled secretary, who spoke English fairly well:

"Immediately after your arrival in China the governor of Amoy, of whom you were a guest, wrote to me all about you. Unfortunately Mr. Evans was quicker than we in securing your services. I would rather have seen you enter our exalted Majesty's service. However, if after the war, which is bound to break out sooner or later between Russia and Japan, you should decide to remain in the Orient, remember that we will be always glad to employ you in our army or whatever other branch of our government you should choose—if only for what you have done to her!" And lifting a violet colored silken cloth which lay heaped on the end of his writing table, he disclosed, fast asleep in a nest of white linen, the baby girl I had saved the day before.

"It is a pity," he continued, in his shrill falsetto voice, "that you have thrown in your lot with that abominable man, Mr. Evans, who is trying to sell Korea to the Japanese. However, the die is cast. Go and do your duty. But remember, if I catch you again on Chinese territory trying to spy on me, that is going to be your fate—" And, drawing aside a heavy window curtain, he pointed with his bony outstretched hand at Chen, whose mangled corpse was dangling stark and limp from the branch of a leafless almond tree.

Bowing stiffly, I stepped out of the viceroy's cabinet, paid my hotel bill and took the next boat for Korea, where I submitted the report of my preliminary work to Mr. Evans, who seemed highly elated over the results I had obtained.

A week or so after my arrival at Seoul, Korea, while I was playing tennis in one of the foreign legations, I received a hurry call from Mr. Evans. To judge from the tenor of his note he was in hot water. When I entered his office I found him nervously pacing up and down in front of a huge iron safe in which he used to keep his secret correspondence and, incidentally, also certain valuable official papers destined for the Japanese foreign office.

The minute he caught sight of me he pointed at the safe and exclaimed in a melodramatic way—

"What do you think of that?"

I could not help laughing at the dismal expression on his dour face, for the safe stood wide open. It had been cracked and robbed while he was out for lunch. My report and a priceless hand drawn map of the Port Arthur fortifications, which Mr. Evans intended to send to Japan, had disappeared. One of the officials reported having seen, shortly after Mr. Evans's departure, a spectacled Chinese step hastily out of the ministry and dive into a rickshaw which had been waiting for him across the street. So Yuan-Chi-Kai had had his revenge!

He had returned my visit to Peking sooner than we had expected, for the description of the presumptive thief coin-

cided with that of the viceroy's secretary who had acted as his interpreter the day on which poor Chen had been tortured to death and strung up on the almond tree. Though the whole police force of the Hermit Empire was immediately set in motion, our effort to recover those papers was fruitless. They had vanished for good. The loss of my report was unimportant because I had a copy of it put away in a safe place; besides, it was then too late anyway for Yuan-Chi to alter his policy.

But the loss of the map of the Port Arthur fortifications was serious, for it represented the *only real map* which had ever been drawn of the 202 Meter Hill, the Long Hill and the 180 Meter Hill section of the advanced positions which protected the harbor of Port Arthur from the west.

Outside of a few antiquated reports the Japanese had really no definite information about that most important sector of the Liaotung Peninsula because those fortifications had been considerably strengthened and remodeled in the meantime by order of General Stoessel, the commander in chief of Port Arthur.

Though most of the prospective improvements in the northern main line of defense had not been finished for lack of funds, the permanent works of Sung-Shu, Er-Lung, Pa-Lung and Ki-Kuan forts along the old Chinese Wall, which lay about four or five kilometers in a northeasterly direction from the Old Town, or Port Arthur proper, had been supplanted by a row of semi-permanent works, including numerous redouts and a series of cleverly laid parallel lines of trenches supplied with searchlights, machine guns and two or three hundred howitzers and field and mountain pieces which provided for a most effective fire in every direction.

The theft of that precious map represented, therefore, a very serious loss not only to Mr. Evans—he was a very shrewd business man—but also to his clients in the Empire of the Rising Sun who had been counting already on the map to guide the future success of General Oku's Second Army and General Nogi's Third Army which were secretly entrusted with the capture of Port Arthur and the Southern Division of the Russian Pacific Squadron under Admiral Starck, which had taken refuge in its spacious harbor.

Those warships had to be eliminated at no matter what price. The Japanese armies operating in Manchuria could not afford to leave in their rear that strongly fortified naval base and part of the Russian fleet, with such powerful units as the battleship *Petropavlovsk;* especially since the Russian Baltic fleet was being put into commission and was expected to report for duty in the Gulf of Petchili as soon as it had been fully mobilized. That clever old rooster, Yuan-Chi-Kai, knew all that and a lot more. His tentacles reached far and his word was law on the shores of the Yellow China Seas. His men had been watching Mr. Evans' agent drawing up that map without interfering with his work until it was finished; then they had pounced on it.

But for the loss of that map which left the Japanese only imperfectly informed as to the real strength of the garrison of Port Arthur and the nature of its defenses perhaps their losses during the siege would not have exceeded ninety thousand men, including thirty thousand sick soldiers.

That night Mr. Evans and I held a long powwow. He was a regular diehard and could talk anybody into anything, no matter how absurd, as long as he saw a chance to profit by it. He was a keen witted, medium sized, mustached sort of chap who had landed in the Orient as most adventurers do—with a considerable amount of cheek and an unquenchable thirst for gold. Mammon was his god. His only dream seemed to be to become a millionaire. Like most prospective millionaires he had forgotten the main thing; that it is very difficult to be on the level when the right opportunity presents itself.

"If I only could secure a new map of the Port Arthur fortifications," he exclaimed in a dramatic way, "though it

were only roughly drawn, I would be a made man. It would enable the Japanese to win the war. And after the war, kid, the world would be ours!"

Thus he kept it up all night, alternately rubbing his monocle with a silken handkerchief and pouring whisky-and-sodas into my tumbler, while he talked and talked, unceasingly, like a Tibetan prayer wheel gone amuck, until, finally, I threw up the sponge in despair and promised him to draw a new map for him, even at the risk of my scalp, for I was positive that Yuan-Chi-Kai was keeping an eye on me.

Port Arthur, though temporarily leased to the Russians was, nevertheless, still Chinese territory and old Yuan-Chi had said—

"If I ever catch you again on Chinese territory you will go up in smoke, and that's that!"

THE INTERPRETER who was to accompany me during this new wild goose chase of mine was a diminutive, bow-legged Chinese who went by the name of Wow-Ling, or Ling for short, and sported a face as wrinkled and shriveled as a dry potato. He was supposed to be an able cartographer. When he bowed himself into my presence I noticed right away that his pigtail was artificial—a sure sign that he had recently escaped from some Chinese prison in the Celestial Empire. In those days the first thing they did with a new convict was to disgrace him by cutting off his queue. But jailbird or not, the fact remained that Wow-Ling was a scholar and a man on whom I could depend, if only because it had been my old Yuan-Chi who had ordered his queue to be cut off.

As General Stoessel, the commander-in-chief of Port Arthur, was a Swiss by birth and as I spoke German, French and Italian and knew Switzerland like a book, I shaved off my mustache, put on a pair of huge horn rimmed yellow spectacles, dressed like a pedler just arrived from Europe and, with a box full of cheap Swiss watches strapped on my back, took passage on a small, ill smelling Chinese trading steamer which was bound for the Ellis Islands and Pi-Tse-Wo in the south-eastern extremity of the Liaotung Peninsula. Ling, masquerading as a coolie, accompanied me. In order to sidetrack Yuan's secret service men I was quoted in the semi-official press as having left for Tokyo by way of Chemulpo on a Japanese steamer the day before.

After a tedious trip of several days on the malodorous Chinese coasting steamer, where I learned to eat rotten fish and drink *saki*, or rice rum like a native, Ling and I landed with a terrible hangover in the miserable little port of Pi-Tse-Wo. We were immediately accosted by a couple of drunken Russian customs house inspectors whose breath reminded me vividly of a cemetery. Fortunately those *mujiks* were already too far gone to notice the boxful of watches which I was carrying on my back. So they let us pass; but the minute we lost sight of them, Ling and I ducked into the nearest alley and started offering our watches for sale to the passers-by.

We were catering especially to the Russian soldiers and officers who happened to come our way. One of them actually bought a watch and paid generously for it. He was surprised to hear me speaking French. When I told him that I was a native of Neufchatel, in Switzerland, he quickly retorted:

"Why don't you go and see our commander-in-chief, General Stoessel? He is also a Swiss. He may be able to get you a job in our intelligence department. Our spies are all well paid."

"But how am I going to meet him? A miserable pedler like me?"

"That's perfectly all right," the officer replied and, producing a pencil, he scribbled a few words on a piece of paper which he handed to me as a sort of safe conduct, with the remark:

"If any one tries to molest you show him this paper. I am Colonel Voronoff."

Colonel Voronoff turned out to be, according to what I heard afterward, no

one less than the chief confidant of Admiral Alexiov, the Russian Imperial resident in eastern Siberia. The reason why he had picked me up "on the street", so to speak, was probably because I had looked suspicious to him and he wanted their intelligence department to give me the third degree. If, after a proper cross-examination, I turned out to be O.K, he would have got the credit for having added a new member to their well organized spy system.

That unexpected streak of luck made me feel so happy that I came within an inch of turning my box full of watches over to the colonel as a present. But Wow-Ling, the wise old duck, pulled me discreetly by the sleeve in a different direction, toward the road which led to Dalney, the commercial harbor of Port Arthur. There we intended to make our headquarters until we had got better acquainted with the situation, for the Russian secret police were a wary lot. Besides, there were persistent rumors afloat that on the day before, February 5th, war had been declared between Russia and Japan.

We had to reckon also with Yuan-Chi-Kai and his murderous gang who would betray us immediately to the Russians if they managed to find out our whereabouts.

After a tiresome tramp over the Pi-Tse-Wo-Nau-Chang road, which resembled in places a river of liquid mud, we finally reached our destination, Dalney. We made ourselves as inconspicuous as possible for a couple of days, for the night before Admiral Togo's battleship fleet had made a surprise attack on and raised havoc with Admiral Starck's Pacific squadron in Port Arthur Bay. That brilliant attack of the Japanese fleet paralyzed the Russian Pacific squadron's activities at least for a few weeks—until Admiral Makarov assumed the command of the combined Russian naval forces on the Pacific.

At the time of our arrival Dalney was in the throes of terror. Japanese forces were expected to land there any moment. The town was seething with troops. These kept hurrying back and forth, making a terrible racket as their field batteries crashed through the narrow thoroughfares on their way to the front—the entrance of the harbor of Port Arthur where the Japanese battleships were keeping the Golden Hill and Tiger Tail fortifications constantly under fire to help their light cruisers and torpedo craft break into the harbor and destroy the Russian fleet. From that day on the rumbling and growling of the artillery duel never ceased.

The blockade of Port Arthur had been definitely established.

The first thing we did when we got to Dalney was to scrape a three-inch layer of genuine Manchurian mud off our legs and hire a filthy little room in the back yard of a Russian tea merchant's house. We also emptied a tumbler of *saki* apiece, to stiffen our backbones, because we realized that we had walked right into the lion's den when we landed in that Liaotung Peninsula without ever suspecting that hostilities were going to break out so suddenly.

After several days' rest in Dalney, where we sold a dozen watches and had a good look around, we moved over to Port Adams, from where we expected to get a good look at Nau-Chang Hill which, according to Mr. Evans, would probably be the place where General Oku's second Army would try to effect a landing after it had finished hibernating at Chinampo, near the mouth of the Yalu River.

As we had brought with us no photograph cameras for fear of detection, our work was entirely mental and, therefore, rather strenuous. Instead of real pictures and notes we had to take mental notes and pictures which we compared and discussed at night in the light of a candle by drawing with our fingers on the stamped earth floor of our filthy room the location and outlines of the various fortifications, redouts, batteries and what not which we had "sized up" that day from the corners of our eyes, while bargaining or bickering for hours with some unsuspecting Russian sentry over the price of

one of our cheap silver plated watches.

Sometimes, when we had obtained exceptionally good results, we would close the deal by selling the coveted watch to the *mujik* on credit—an unheard-of thing which was immediately talked about and made us very popular, especially among the rank and file.

Every night, after tracing and retracing, sometimes for hours, on the dirty mud floor of our room and by the light of a candle, the outlines of the various entrenchments which we had come across that day, Ling would write down and draw with the help of a magnifying glass our mental notes and pictures on a diminutive piece of very thin tissue paper, about the size of one-third of a cigaret paper. After I had examined it and declared it O.K. Ling would roll it into a ball, about twice the size of a pinhead, and "file it away". He would pull one of his three or four hollow gold teeth out of his mouth, place the paper ball into it, shut the empty tooth with a piece of wax and push it back into its original place.

Thus, while the guns were roaring all around us and the black ravens kept croaking and begging for more carrion, Ling and I, with our little stock in trade, were adding every day a new map or record to our collection in Ling's "portable files" without anybody suspecting what we were really up to.

Then came the great day—the day on which we decided to try our luck in Port Arthur itself, in spite of the blockade. But we found it almost impossible to break through the lines of entrenchments, which surrounded that town, without attracting the attention of the Russian police. There were only two roads that led into Port Arthur: one which led by the Shui-Shi, or the temple waterworks, and the Sung-Shu fort, down the river valley to the Old Town, and the mud road of Yu-Kia-Tung hamlet, west of New Town, which was almost inaccessible on account of the big detour which one had to make in order to reach it.

Seeing the impossibility of using either of those two roads, we hired at Dalney a fisherman by the name of Huang to take us to the Tiger Tail promontory at the entrance of the harbor of Port Arthur. Our trip was extremely dangerous because of the drift ice and the heavy seas which threatened to upset our frail boat as well as the Japanese gunboats and torpedo craft which were liable to mistake us for Russian blockade runners and sink us.

Fortunately we managed to negotiate a landing on the Tiger Tail Peninsula without being detected. Huang, in whose shack we had settled down for the time being, was an old-timer; that is to say, a veteran. He hated the Russians and Japanese alike. When I told him, through Ling, that I was a native of Switzerland which could not send troops to China or bombard Chinese ports because it had no fleet, he felt greatly relieved and sold us some rice, cooked fish and *saki*, which came in very handy after our cold night's trip.

Before we squatted on the floor to enjoy our frugal meal I requested Wow-Ling, as usual, to take out his gold teeth first lest he swallow by mistake some of our valuable information. The few copper coins which we paid for our meals and our promise to sell Huang one of our watches on credit if he managed to land us in Port Arthur proper, in a place where the custom house inspectors would not catch sight of us, soon turned old Huang into a friend of ours. Whenever a Russian patrol approached his cabin he would immediately warn us so that we could hide.

Finally, after several days of anxious suspense, he landed us on a dark night in front of the shack of his nephew Chang, on the Port Arthur waterfront. Chang rented us a room in which we spent the rest of the night discussing our future projects.

NEXT morning, while we were elbowing our way through a crowd of malodorous coolies, beggars and an endless stream of Russian soldiers who seemed to be filling every available space in Port

Arthur's main thoroughfares, two policemen stopped us and demanded to see our license because we were already busy trying to sell our watches and, incidentally, taking in the lay of the land. As we could not produce the desired license they grabbed us rather unceremoniously and threw us into jail. When they led us that afternoon to their police captain to give an account of ourselves I pulled out the slip of paper which Colonel Voronoff had given me and showed it to the captain. Instantly his ferocious face took on a paternal expression and in a most gracious manner he returned it to me with a hearty—

"*Merci, monsieur*, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Most assuredly there is," I replied meekly. "How about the watches which your two policemen took away from us yesterday?"

Unfortunately, hard as he tried, the captain could not solve the mystery; his two subordinates swore by St. Peter and St. Paul that they had never seen those watches. Those idiots did not realize that by denying their guilt they were giving me a pretext to ask the general for protection. But General Stoessel was nowhere to be found. Nobody seemed to know his whereabouts. During our comings and goings, while trying to locate him, we had ample opportunity to size up the Port.

We checked up also on the disabled warships and those that were seaworthy, as well as on the Japanese gunfire, which was extremely defective—probably for lack of proper maps.

After we had it all mapped down, recorded and filed away together with a detailed list of all the available ordnance on the Russian warships, I called on the police captain to find out the address of Colonel Voronoff. The captain and I had become quite chummy by that time, probably because I never allowed him to pay for the drinks.

I found him in one of the most disreputable joints of the waterfront. By the time I got there the captain was already lightly intoxicated. He had knocked a drunken sailor down and was kicking him in the stomach. When I asked him for the colonel's address he answered in a surly and evasive way. After he had gulped down his eleventh drink and asked for more he suddenly squared himeslf in front of me and, with a feline smile on his bloated face, said: "Listen, brother, you don't look like a Swiss to me. The hell if you do. You better come along . . . !"

But that was about as far as he got, for by that time the barmaid had taken a hand in the business. She pressed a glass full of vodka to his lips. After he had gulped it down, he crumpled up like a wet rag, the victim of a stroke of apoplexy apparently, but, in reality, of an overdose of knockout drops.

The captain's demise did not cause much comment as there were many captains being killed in those days in Port Arthur by the shells of the Japanese navy. Besides, that police captain was extremely unpopular. The barmaid offered me the hospitality of her father's home: a hospitality of which I availed myself occasionally without giving up however my original lodgings at young Chang's cabin on the waterfront. With Martha's home in the Tenderloin, Chang's shack at the waterfront and old Huang's cabin on the Tiger Tail Promontory, Ling and I would not lack a place to hide in case of an emergency.

That same day, after the police captain's body had been removed from the place, Ling and I went to visit Colonel Voronoff on 202 Meter Hill. While we kept moving up the hill we were counting carefully our steps to ascertain the approximate distance between the Russian warships and that famous fortification whose big caliber guns dominated the harbor. We were repeatedly forced off the narrow road by heavy convoys of provisions or ammunition, or by galloping field batteries. Halfway up the slope a mounted patrol blocked our way, but allowed us to pass on after scrutinizing the colonel's note.

At the entrance of the citadel I requested the officer on guard to announce to Colonel Voronoff the arrival of the Swiss watch pedler he had met at Pi-Tse-Wo. I was immediately received. I found the colonel on top of the fortification examining a battery of mountain howitzers.

He promised me to see what he could do about the stolen watches and was surprised when I explained to him the difficulties I had had while trying to find out General Stoessel's whereabouts. To save me further trouble he handed me a personal letter of introduction to the general whom, he told me, I could reach next day in the Pan-Lung forts, near the old Chinese Wall. During our conversation I managed to get a wonderful bird's-eye view of the Long Hill and 180 Meter Hill, which lay directly west of us, as well as of the main line of defense which spread out toward the north in a semicircle, beginning with the Sung-Shu fort on the west and ending with the Ki-Kuan forts on the eastern extremity of the old Chinese Wall.

That night our files were enriched with three more magnificent new maps, for Ling, who had stood aside with a look in his eyes like a dying lamb, had absorbed enough mental notes that afternoon to fill a volume.

Next morning Ling and I attended the police captain's funeral, and afterward started walking up the valley, following the railroad tracks. We were headed for the famous Pan-Lung forts, the chief citadels of the northern main line of defense. But we were not in a hurry to get there. If we did not meet General Stoessel that day we would probably meet him some other day. What we were after was to avoid a miserable box full of cheap Swiss watches and a mercenary Swiss soldier named Stoessel.

Whenever an outpost or mounted patrol tried to block our way, out came Colonel Voronoff's letter, our talisman, our magic key that opened all doors like the legendary lamp of Aladdin. There is no need to mention that we lost our way half a dozen times and that when we finally reached the Pan-Lung forts we were informed that General Stoessel had just left for some other place. Too bad!

That night we used up half a dozen candles and, by the time we got through with our work, our files were crammed full; there was not enough space left in Wow-Ling's detachable gold teeth even for one more tiny little map or report. The time had arrived for us to beat it back to Korea as fast as our legs could carry us.

We realized that our lucky streak could not last forever, especially in view of the mysterious death of the police captain. The military authorities had disinterred his corpse for the purpose of examining the contents of his stomach.

That evening I had a premonition. I decided to spend the night at the home of the barmaid's father. Next morning, as I was having breakfast, they called my attention to a squad of policemen who were scrutinizing the passers-by on Main Street: some of them they even stopped and dragged to the nearest police station. While I watched with my face glued to the window pane that ominous spectacle, full of gruesome forebodings—for my guilty conscious told me that there was going to be hell to pay in Chinatown—I drew back from the window with the gasp. Proud as a peacock, the cause of all that trouble was waddling down the street—my evil spirit, the spectacled secretary of Yuan-Chi-Kai, who had probably got wind of our activities and was causing the Russian police to do some house cleaning.

Our game was up. I hid in the cellar and sent a messenger to warn Wow-Ling. That night Chang smuggled me over to old Huang's shack on the Tiger Tail Promontory where I spent several weeks in hiding—until the ice broke up sufficiently to allow Huang to take me to Chinampo where General Oku's Second Army was getting ready for its intended landing on the Liaotung Peninsula.

The day after I reached Huang's cabin I received a note from the barmaid which told me all about Wow-Ling's tragic

death and the loss of our portable files with all the valuable information they contained. It seems that Ling, without suspecting what was up, had come out of his rathole and walked right into the lion's mouth. After they had tortured him to death Yuan-Chi's secretary had examined his body and found our files with their priceless contents.

When I reached Chinampo I found there Mr. Evans already waiting for me. A torpedo boat which had stopped us on the high seas had informed him that I was headed that way. He was highly elated also this time over the results which I had obtained for, according to what he told me in a confidential way, the greater part of the photostat copies of our original maps had been substracted in the meantime by one of his agents from Yuan-Chi-Kai's desk in Peking and were going to be used during the forthcoming offensive of General Oku's Second Army against the Russians on the Liaotung Peninsula.

A few days later, on May 5, 1904, if I am not mistaken, I landed once more at Pi-Tse-Wo, though not with a box full of cheap watches strapped to my back, but smartly dressed and in shining riding boots to participate in the successful storming of Nau-Chang Hill which marked the beginning of the siege of Port Arthur. Unfortunately the minute I stepped ashore a Russian bullet tore a deep gash across my stomach—probably to warn me never to try intelligence work again. A warning which I have heeded ever since.

THE REAL KING OF BIRDS

By WYMAN SIDNEY SMITH

A LAND of birds where not a single snake lived, not a single mammal except a bat, and with one gigantic bird that stood twelve feet high to lord it over his kingdom—such was New Zealand until the coming of white men and Maoris. The moa was king of birds.

The huge moa, largest bird ever to live on earth, is extinct, but had Columbus sailed to New Zealand instead of to America, or had some other early explorer reached the islands, they could have seen this enormous twelve-foot high creature. The moa was still ranging the two islands a mere five centuries ago, and lived on the southern island until three centuries ago.

It was covered with soft feathers from the head down to its legs, which were as big as those of a horse. It had no wings, and as there were never any snakes or animals of prey in its domain, it never had to fight until the Maoris came. They hunted it, killed it, ate its flesh, and still tell stories about it.

White scientists have found only the bones, the feathers, and remnants of egg shells, to establish its relationship to the ostrich, emu, and cassowary—all of them flightless birds.

CHAPTER I

THREE SHIPS TO THE SOUTH

OLD MAN MOREAU was dead, and Manisty was standing his trial at Amanu.

Moreau was found sprawled across his dirty table in his dirty little hut among the palms of Kilea. His stained coat showed where a knife had been plunged between the shoulder blades. On his wrinkled face was a queer look of surprise. Doc Peters said he had died of shock just as much as knife blade. It seemed to most folks that Doc ought to know. He often had to say quite quickly why a man had died.

Ruthven of the *Flying Spaniard*, and his partner, Scarlett, had found the body. They had strolled up about nine in the evening, and at a quarter past they were scurrying down the hill again, shouting for help. Help wasn't much good to Moreau. He must have been dead before seven o'clock. That was as near as they could get. They got as near as that because Manisty went up to see him at six, and forty minutes later came into Kennedy's store and asked for rum.

Manisty—yes.

They found a piece of torn blue cotton that matched Manisty's shirt. That would not have told much by itself. But they found it in Old Man Moreau's hand. That told of a quarrel, a struggle perhaps.

Beginning

A

Novel

of the

South Seas

TRAITOR'S BANE

By BASIL CAREY

Manisty admitted a quarrel. It wouldn't have been much use denying it. Two Kanakas had heard raised voices as they passed the hut.

Callaghan was with Manisty when the mob swept into Kennedy's store. Half a dozen angry whites and a score of hysterical Kanakas surged through the narrow door. Voices screamed, hands struggled to reach their prey. Callaghan's great body stopped them. He flung himself in front of Manisty, a gun in each hairy hand.

"What the hell is it?" he demanded in his bull's voice. "Manisty? What do you want with him?"

"Moreau's been killed," said Ruthven. "See what he was holding." He held up the scrap of faded cloth. "Let me fit that on to Manisty's shirt."

"It's a lie," said Manisty. "It's a lie."

But they seized him in spite of Callaghan and spread out the rag on a hole where the bronzed skin showed. A howl of triumphant rage went up, echoing through the door into the night. Torquil and Blaise heard it in the hut where they were at cards and whisky with Bill Porteous. They started up with the cards still in their hands and raced to the village, scudding through the dark like hounds on a scent.

They were just in time.

Callaghan and Manisty were in the middle of the seething, hysterical mob. Back to back they stood in the doorway

of the store. The oil lamps within the wrecked room shed a smoky glare on the struggling figures. Monstrous shadows loomed and wheeled across the walls. A Kanaka limped away howling like a dog. Kennedy hurled his wisp of a body impartially against both parties in frantic efforts to sweep the crowd outside his door. Above the din came Callaghan's rich, deep voice raised in impassioned curses. Torquil and Blaise flung themselves to the rescue—because, like Callaghan and Manisty, they were of the *Peregrine*, and hated the very seas Scarlett and Ruthven sailed.

In the middle of the uproar came the sound of a bicycle bell, and the Resident cannoned into the mêlée. He was clad somewhat sketchily in pajama trousers and an oilskin. He had in fact leaped from his bath on hearing the news shouted by one of his boys.

"What's it all about?" he spluttered, still astride the machine, his fat feet planted firmly on the ground. "Stop it. *Stop it!* D'ye hear me?"

His mild blue eyes wandered from face to face. Although he was stout and elderly and had the guileless expression of a cherubic choir boy, he ruled Kilea without favor or mercy. Strangers, deceived by his apparent innocence, sometimes tried to take a rise out of him. Their enlightenment was, as a rule, very complete.

"Got to tell me," he panted. "'S' disgraceful row I ever heard in my—Ruthven, what's the matter? Shut up, Kennedy. You Kanaka, you all same be still. Suppose one fella boy makem row me tellem ghost come take away. Torquil, put up your gun. Callaghan, will you stop using that language before I use worse? Get up, Manisty. Get up, sir. What's all the trouble about?"

"Them devils—"

"Moreau up yonder—he's dead."

"You can't fix it on me. You can't—you can't!"

It was Ruthven who pushed them aside with his brawny arms and strode up to the Resident. Red Ruthven, they called him, from the red hair that he shook so impatiently out of his hot blue eyes.

"Moreau's dead. Manisty went up there. They had a row. When Scarlett and I went up about nine, Moreau was dead. He had hold of this—" he opened his hand to show the crumpled rag. "It matches Manisty's shirt."

There was silence now. Only the eternal boom of the water on the reef sounded, like the drums of doom beating for a dead man. Manisty's voice tore across the sudden quiet.

"It's a lie! I went up. We did have a row. That's true. He tried to bully me and I hit out. He tore my shirt. But I came away then. I didn't kill him. I'll swear it on my mother."

Kennedy held up a lamp and the light fell on Manisty's scared face. He was short and slight, and his terror had made him look oddly young and boyish in spite of his thirty-six years. In his sallow face his frightened eyes moved from side to side seeking for his friends—for Torquil, with a grim hand still on his gun, and Blaise, head up like a colt at the smell of blood.

"Let's go up to Moreau's," said the Resident.

THEY went up the hill to the hut and opened the door that old Moreau had always kept locked. The Resident, conscious by this time of the undignified figure which he presented, hurried matters through. It was very disturbing, very upsetting, and his mackintosh flapped clammily against his bare legs. There was no doctor on Kilea. The body must go to Amanu. And Manisty—Manisty would have to go as well. The Resident beckoned to Scarlett.

"It'll mean the court at Amanu. You'll be wanted to give evidence."

"Can't it be settled here?"

The Resident looked at him.

"No. When it's a charge of murder, I can't do anything except make an arrest. Old Patterson at Amanu

can pass a death sentence. I can't."

Scarlett frowned.

"Who's going to ship the body? I would, only Ruthven's sister's on board."

"Sister?" said the Resident vaguely.

"Yes. She's come out to the islands for a bit. We're taking her over to Johnson Island to stay with the missionary's wife." His eyes met the Resident's. "Guess it'll be the first time in years that I've been civil to a *padre*. They don't like me, somehow."

The Resident bit back a rejoinder and stared at the quiet body that sprawled so pitifully across the table. Then his eyes wandered aimlessly round the dirty little room. Suddenly he stiffened and pointed to a dim corner.

"My God, his old box is open."

Ruthven stooped his tall body, thrusting among the refuse for the thing which the Resident had spied. There it lay, unlocked at last, its rusty hinges bent back. Ruthven picked it up and set it on the table. Curious eyes searched its emptiness. Eager fingers poked furtively at the dull, iron bound sides. It was not more than a foot high, and it stood eighteen inches square—a solid bit of work with its iron bands and its two locks.

What had Old Man Moreau kept there? Everybody in the islands knew about it. Most men who came ashore on Kilea had had a squint at it. The thing had passed into a proverb: "Yes, I bet he'll pay that debt the same day Moreau opens his box."

"It wasn't forced," the Resident said. staring at the lid. "Most likely he unlocked it himself."

Was that how it had been? Had Moreau been caught unawares gazing at his hidden treasure? Had Manisty persuaded him for old friendship to open the box, and then struck him down and made off with the spoil? An excited chattering broke out. Attention wavered from the dead man to the dead man's secret. What had he hidden in that box? And where was it now? Eyes began to wander to Manisty, and to his friends. The crowd muttered, fell silent. It was left for Scarlett to say:

"Where've you cached the goods, Manisty? In one of your pals' pockets?"

With difficulty the Resident quelled the uproar. He yelled to the police boys, and a dozen willing hands tore Scarlett out of Torquil's grip. The crowd took sides with joyous violence. It was Callaghan at last who quieted them. His bull voice rose in a roar.

"Shame, shame on you all to be fightin' when the dead's here. Hold your noise, Scarlett! Give over, all of you."

He and the Resident between them restored order at last. The flushed, sullen faces under the yellow light looked wolfish. One by one they turned to Manisty. Through the open door came a faint breeze that lifted the damp hair from his forehead. His scared eyes sought Torquil's.

"Is your boat unloaded, Mason?" asked the Resident.

Mason, of the *Heart's Delight*, nodded.

"Then you'll go down to Amanu tomorrow with Manisty aboard—and Moreau as well. You can claim compensation from Patterson. Ruthven, Scarlett, you'll be wanted as witnesses."

"But—" began Ruthven.

Scarlett cut across him.

"We'll be there," he promised.

The Resident turned to Torquil.

"You'd better attend as well," he said. "Oh, yes, I'll have all the warrants and the rest of the red tape ready before you sail."

"Help me," said Manisty's tortured eyes. "Help me."

The police boys closed round him, shepherding him down the hill toward the lagoon. The Resident set a guard over the body and went home to write. His deputy, Warrender, would accompany Manisty.

So it was the deputy who went aboard the *Heart's Delight*. Manisty went with him, after formal arrest on a charge of murdering Moreau. Torquil and Blaise heaved anchor, and the *Peregrine* tossed her head and turned to Amanu, three days' journey south. Staring back at

the *Flying Spaniard*, Blaise caught a glimpse of Scarlett's sleek black head.

"Damn his eyes," he said vindictively.

"He's black," Torquil said. "He and Ruthven—red and black together—diamond and a spade."

"There's a girl aboard," Blaise said suddenly.

"Ruthven's sister. Hell, we saw her in the village yesterday."

Blaise looked away.

"Yes. I remember."

Callaghan swung the *Peregrine* southward. There was a stiff breeze, and she raced before the wind like a thing unloosed. He glanced back sharply at his two companions. Blaise looked less than his twenty years. His body was still colt-like in spite of his strength. Callaghan remembered the days five years ago when Torquil had brought the lad aboard in Sydney harbor, all limp and scared. Torquil admitted nonchalantly that he had fought Williams—Bull Williams of the *Happy Flo*—for possession of the belt that had drawn the boy's blood. Mr. Williams being in no condition to pursue, they had left harbor with leisurely dignity.

"Reckon young Blaise would go through fire for Torquil," thought Callaghan. "Torquil, now, who can guess what's goin' on under his black hair?"

He glanced again at the lean, muscular body. Torquil's gray eyes were turned on the *Heart's Delight*, ploughing after them, listing a little under the wind.

So three ships went south, and every man on board wondered and supposed and hazarded what would happen at the trial. Manisty sat with his head in his hands and refused his food. Ruthven's mouth grew tighter. Torquil polished his gun. Mason urged the *Heart's Delight* forward, and wondered how much compensation he could claim above his due.

The only unconcerned person was Old Man Moreau, who accompanied them, traveling snugly in the hold of the *Heart's Delight*, nailed down in a cask of brine.

II

THE COURTROOM at Amanu was very hot. Sir Henry Patterson, Governor of Amanu, Chief Magistrate of the Southern Pakahiki Group, eased his collar with a damp finger. His beefy face was clouded. It wasn't often he had a case like this. No, by gad, and a good thing, too. If the whites couldn't behave themselves, how were the Kanakas to be controlled?

He looked at the jury. A mixed lot, he decided, but the best that could be raked together. Five anxious looking planters; Bates the storekeeper; Casey of the *Montrose* and his mate; Purcell of the *Dolphin*; the Wesleyan missionary, and a couple of Englishmen who were spending six months in Amanu for the fishing. Young Warrender from Kilea was defending Manisty at Torquil's urgent demand. Opposing him was Feuchter, whom the people of Amanu called "God's little gray rat." He was Sir Henry's right hand man. His soft, sure speech penetrated to the corners of the room. He had begun his examination of Manisty.

"You had known Moreau for some time?"

"Yes."

"What were your relations with him?"

"Eh?"

"How did you get to know him?"

"Sailed with him years ago."

"How many years ago?"

"Maybe thirteen."

"When did you leave him?"

"When he quit the sea."

"How long ago was that?"

"Eight years."

"So you sailed with him for five years?"

"Yes."

"During that time did you ever quarrel?"

"I object," said Warrender, rising.

"Objection upheld," growled Sir Henry.

Feuchter shrugged.

"When he left the sea, did you visit him often?"

"Ever' time we touched Kilea. Eight or nine times."

"I see. When did you see him last?"

"Last Monday."

"How did he receive you?"

"He was in a hell of a temper," said Manisty sullenly.

"Can you account for this?"

"He said some one was after his box."

"Do you think he was nervous that some one might try to steal it?"

"Yes."

"Why should any one steal his box?" Feuchter rapped out.

"Because of what was in it."

"I suggest that you knew what was in it?"

"Nobody knew."

"Where was the box when you entered the room?"

"In front of him. The key was in the lock."

"Thank you," said Feuchter, and sat down.

Warrender rose to re-examine.

"Manisty, you see that bit of blue stuff on the table."

"Aye."

"It matches your shirt, doesn't it?"

"It does."

"Tell us what happened, then. Speak out."

The scared eyes crept round the unfriendly room and found Sir Henry.

"He thought I was after his box, sir. He see me come in and he put his arms round it and stared like he'd seen a snake. 'What do you want?' he says. 'Get out.' 'Why,' I says, 'Moreau, I don't want yer ruddy box. I only come up to say as we're sailin' Wednesday and what about that tobacco from Degas that you spoke about.' "

Manisty moistened his dry lips.

"He jumped for me. Jumped like an old monkey. Only that I thought he was crazy I'd have laid him out cold. We had a scuffle and I tried to hold him off. He tore my shirt. It was an old one and I reckon the stuff come away easy."

"And then?"

"I come away."

"Where did you go?"

"Down to Kennedy's and had some rum. Callaghan was there."

"That'll do," said Warrender, and put Torquil in the box. "Has Manisty ever been heard to utter threats against Moreau?"

"No."

"Is he of a violent or quarrelsome nature?"

"Certainly not."

"Does he drink to excess?"

"No."

"How long have you known him?"

"Seven years."

THE VOICES went on. It seemed to Sir Henry that they would never stop. He listened to them vaguely. That young Warrender wasn't much use. Feuchter would pull the case to shreds. What was the good of giving Manisty an angelic character? If they could prove that the fellow had never been near the place, or that the scrap of cloth hadn't been torn from his shirt, it might be some use. He glanced at the jury. Half asleep, most of them in this stifling hour before noonday. Ah, but they'd wake up when Feuchter's slippery voice began to slide into their ears. Sir Henry rubbed the backs of his large hands. H'm. Yes. The fellow in the dock was shifty eyed, scared, furtive looking. If the jury brought him in guilty, it would be the second hanging in Amanu in a year. The last one had been a Kanaka accused of killing his wife. Damn nuisance, all this. And damn hot. There was something to be said for the English climate after all. Feuchter had got Manisty again.

"I suggest that you and Moreau quarreled about his box!"

"He hit me," said Manisty. "I said, 'I don't want—' "

"We heard that. I suggest that you tried to take the box from him by force?"

"No."

"At least you were curious to know what was in it? You have told us the

box was there on the table. Come, now. Human nature, Manisty. Weren't you curious?"

"No."

"No? Perhaps you knew what was in it? Is that why you were not curious?"

"No."

"You have heard Doctor Peters' evidence. He reports that the wound was caused by a short knife, such as seamen carry. You have already admitted that you own such a knife."

"Ever'body's got a knife."

"Exactly. So any one might have done it. Especially any one who was alone with Moreau. Some one with whom he had quarreled. Some one—who knew what was in the box."

Manisty was trembling.

"I never done it," he blurted out in an unsteady voice. "Oh, Gawdawmighty, Sir Henry, you ain't goin' to let 'em git me for what I ain't done? I did have a row with him. I did fight him. But I never killed him. Strike me, I never killed him."

"That'll do," said Feuchter. "Call Scarlett."

Scarlett strode into the witness box. He stood there motionless, and the jury stared at him. They all knew of him, and Ruthven, and the *Flying Spaniard* that carried such strange cargoes. They saw a slim, sallow faced man of middle height, with curious half shut eyes and straight black hair brushed straight back from his forehead. People said his mother had been a Portuguese girl over in Suva. He had a dago look, a queer foreign grace of bearing that marked him out in any group of white men. He stood very still while he spoke, answering Feuchter's questions in a level voice whose dispassionate coldness matched the lawyer's own.

"Your name is Giles Scarlett?"

"Yes."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-seven."

"How long have you been in these parts?"

"I returned from England when I was eighteen."

"Your ship is the *Flying Spaniard?*"

"Yes."

"Where were you on Monday last?"

"At Kilea."

"Can you give the court any account of the way in which you spent the evening?"

"Certainly. From six till seven I was on board with my partner. We decided to go ashore. The Kanakas were lighting their beach fires. We strolled up and down for an hour or more. Then we had a drink and decided to go and see Moreau. He was an expert on pearls. I wanted his opinion on one that I had found on the outward voyage. There were no lights in the hut. We found the door wide open and went in. I struck a light and called Moreau."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because I have never known him to leave his door open at night. He was very suspicious. He feared thieves would get his box."

"Tell the court what you found."

"He was lying across the table with his arms outstretched. In one hand he held a piece of torn cloth. We took it from him and went at once to the village and raised the alarm."

"How long had Moreau been dead, in your opinion?"

"A couple of hours. The blood on the coat was dry."

Ruthven came next. He confirmed everything that Scarlett had said. The two Kanakas who had heard quarreling were called. They testified to hearing loud voices raised in dispute. They had not stopped. They knew it was dangerous to interfere in white men's quarrels.

A shock headed Degas boy was next. He was Natui, one of the boys from the *Flying Spaniard*. He wore a scarlet *pareu* and in his bush of hair two hibiscus flowers were set in jaunty fashion.

"What name belong you?" said Feuchter.

"Natui," with a complacent grin.

"You all same boy belong Sekeleti—Scarlett?"

"Um."

"You savvy Manitee?"

"Savvy."

"You see him Kilea three, four day?"

"Um."

"You tellem how you see Manitee do."

A smile of pride at his importance swept over Natui's face.

"Me wait make beach fire. All same wait long time. Me go find him girl belong Kenitee—Kennedy. Bimeby look up hill; him Manitee come all same quick. Him carry knife. Bimeby stop."

The jury were wide awake now. They leaned forward, their eyes expectant. The whole atmosphere tightened.

"Him Manitee take out one fella rag. Him knife all same dirty. Puttem in ground."

Natui illustrated his words with the instinctive pantomime of his race. He held up an imaginary knife, stared at it, plunged it into the ground to cleanse it of something, wiped it fastidiously on a scrap of rag and flung the rag disdainfully aside. There was haste in his movements. They were the actions of some one who was hurrying awkwardly, furtively, desperately. Warrender sprang to his feet.

"I challenge that statement," he said hotly. "Where is the rag?"

"Doctor Peters has it," said Feuchter pleasantly. "I will now call Doctor Peters."

"Doctor," said Feuchter. "You have tested Moreau's coat for blood stains?"

"Yes."

Sir Henry leaned forward.

"But I understood—"

"The coat and shirt were removed before the body was placed in—ah—a preservative," said Feuchter.

"Before the voyage from Kilea?"

"Yes. Doctor, you have also made blood tests with a piece of rag handed to you?"

"I have."

"What are your conclusions?"

"That the blood in both cases is human blood."

III

AFTER that, Feuchter tore the case to shreds as Sir Henry had known he would. In vain Warrender tried to discredit Natui. In vain Callaghan spoke for his friend, hurling his words at the jury in a voice that echoed round the steaming court. The scrap of stained rag and the scrap of blue cloth were weaving a halter for Manisty. He sat there, a pale, tense figure, his eyes fixed on those pieces of evidence. His lips moved continuously. His hunted eyes turned again and again to Torquil. He and Torquil had always hit it off. Callaghan was his pal— Yes. And young Blaise was a friendly young chap. But Torquil—why, Torquil could drive a ship through any sea. He could do the things that Manisty had never had the nerve or the strength to do. Surely he would not fail now. Surely he would think of something—so that Manisty should not die.

A hush fell on the court. Sir Henry's voice broke the silence.

"The court will adjourn until two o'clock."

There was a shuffling of feet. Manisty was removed between two native police boys shepherded by young Watson, chief of police on Amanu. Into the blasting heat of midday strode Torquil, Blaise at his heels.

"It's going against him," Blaise said.

His lips were not quite steady in his sunburned face. His troubled eyes stared at the restless sea. It was the first time that tragedy had touched him so nearly. He caught Torquil's arm.

"What's all this rot about that rag? I believe it's a put up yarn."

"Manisty wouldn't hurt a fly," said Torquil savagely. "They're framing him—Scarlett . . . Where's Callaghan?"

"Gone for a drink. If we could find that boy—"

"Natui?"

"Yes. Scarlett's put him up to it."

"There won't be a dog's chance. Scarlett and Ruthven will keep him

close." Torquil's eyes blazed. "If Manisty swings I'll get 'em both," he said. "Scarlett's a sly devil. Like a fox. He's the brains of that pair. Ruthven's got the brawn, but he's two kinds of a fool. He'll ruin that outfit one day."

"Shut up," said Blaise suddenly. "Here's the girl."

Ruthven's sister was coming down the beach road. The two set their faces. Her height and the graceful swing of her walk showed her kinship with the red headed man who was helping to swear away Manisty's life. Her hair was paler than his, her eyes a cool blue-gray. As she passed the two men a sudden wave of color swept over her face. But it was only Blaise who noticed the determined chin, the haughty poise of the proud head on the white throat. Her lips were very red and full. He became aware that he had stopped to gaze after the tall figure that swung so haughtily toward the village.

"What the hell's the matter?" demanded Torquil's irritable voice. "Why are you looking at her like that?"

"She's beautiful."

"She's Ruthven's sister."

"Hell, you needn't get sore. I'm not in love with her."

"Plenty of men are, though. I suppose she and Scarlett—"

"What's her name?"

"Gillian."

"Gillian . . . "

"Why do you say it like that?"

"Like what? Don't be a fool. I've only seen her twice."

Torquil swung the boy round to face him.

"You're young," he said. "You don't know what women are. Forget Ruthven's sister. She'd tear your heart out and fling it back at you. Leave her alone."

"Come on," said Blaise shortly. "If we're going to get a drink we'd better hustle."

"He didn't do it," Torquil was saying as they strode up the sandy road. Blaise's mind swung back to the peril that hovered over Manisty.

"We've only got his word. He can't bring any one to speak for him. Even those boys who heard the sound of quarreling—well, what would be the use of bringing them? He admits that he had a row with Moreau."

"He hasn't got a chance," Torquil said gloomily.

Restlessly they moved about, in and out of Miller's store, where Callaghan sat drinking rum with a stolid air. The three of them did not talk much. There was nothing to say. Men watched them covertly over their drinks. The friends of the accused must be treated with circumspection until the result of the trial was known.

AT TWO o'clock they were back in the stifling court room. It seemed smaller, stuffier than in the earlier part of the day. Sir Henry shuffled in, sweating as he took his seat. Torquil leaned back against the wall. He couldn't bear to look at Manisty. The fellow seemed so small, so pitifully weak. Yet he was holding himself upright, struggling gamely to keep his courage in face of the world. Torquil had a swift vision of a small mangy terrier that he had rescued from boys in a back street in Frisco. He remembered the terrified beating of the heart under his hand as he carried the little trembling beast away. Manisty had the same desperate look in his eyes.

Warrender rose and put the best he knew into the speech for the defense. His voice sounded thin against Feuchter's rich sonority. His arguments were no arguments. He had only Manisty's word, his vehement denials, his desperate explanations. Warrender did what he could, but he knew it was useless. It was no good hurling words like "mercy" and "circumstantial evidence" at the jury. Their verdict could be read in their eyes. The quarrel, the raised voices, the theft from the box, Natui's damning evidence, the production of the stained rag and the blood stiff coat—what could young Warrender put against

all these? Torquil felt Callaghan stiffen. Young Blaise was very white. Warrender faltered out a concluding appeal and sat down.

Feuchter rose—slimy brute, with his fat face and his six hairs parted in the middle. What was he saying?

". . . A despicable crime. An old man, a lonely man living outside the village. A defenseless man. He had friends. Oh, yes. The accused was one of them. Why did he go alone to see Moreau? Ask yourselves what his purpose can have been. Why should he go alone, and at that hour? The old man suspected his intentions. He probably received him coldly. He had before him the secret treasure which had become an obsession with him. Manisty denies that he knew the nature of that treasure. I suggest that he knew perfectly well what was in the box. He had the chance of getting it, gentlemen. He was alone with the old man. Sudden greed, sudden desire—who of us is exempt from it? Yet is that an excuse for murder? Are we to allow our lives to depend on the impulses of our so-called friends? Will it bring Moreau back to life if we prove that he was killed while his friend was swept by a desire for possession? Gentlemen, we live where justice must fight against many enemies. The life of these islands is rough and hard. Things occur that could occur in no other part of the world with impunity. How many crimes are committed that are neither discovered nor punished? But here—in this court—you are called to take up the cause of justice. Killing is killing, gentlemen. Shall the innocent die, and the slayer go free?"

Torquil set his teeth. Would the fellow never stop mouthing? The jury were lapping it up. They loved being called gentlemen, loved the feeling of importance that Feuchter poured over them like oil. When at last he stopped they were all sitting bolt upright—except Purcell of the *Dolphin*. Their hostile eyes swept over Manisty with something that was almost indignation. Even Casey—who hated Feuchter and shut his eyes while the fellow talked—was frowning. Torquil's heart sank.

When Sir Henry began his summing up, the entire court leaned forward, holding its breath. Torquil was sunk in dull misery. He was watching those two, watching Ruthven and Scarlett—the red and the black—as he listened to Sir Henry's staccato sentences.

". . . The question of motive. You have heard that there was a quarrel. Manisty himself admits that the subject of that quarrel was the treasure which Moreau kept hidden."

Damn the treasure, anyway. Who cared what it was, or where it was? Ah, but the man who knew where it was knew the murderer. It couldn't be Manisty. Manisty hadn't the guts to kill a man. Besides, he'd never cared about Moreau's blasted secret. But somebody had. Somebody had wanted that box and the things that lay in it—the secret, hidden things for which a man's life had been poured out. Somebody was hiding behind Manisty, using him as a screen for his own dirty hide.

". . . Then it is your duty to return a verdict of guilty. If, on the other hand, you are satisfied that the accused's explanations of his movements on the night of the murder—"

Murder. It wouldn't stop at Moreau's murder. If Manisty swung . . .

"The jury will now retire to consider their verdict."

With heroic promptitude the jury shuffled into the stifling hole provided for them. Callaghan was ruffling his black head. Blaise and Torquil sat like statues. No one left the court. No one expected that the jury would be absent for more than a few minutes. At the back of the room a whispered argument was going on. Through the high window a palm could be seen, swaying against the blue of the sky. Somewhere a girl was laughing. There was still laughter in the world, then. Feuchter dropped a book and the noise slashed across the strained quiet of the room like a knife.

After a quarter of an hour that had been intolerable, a door opened and the jury trooped in. Purcell was the foreman. He had a grim look on his red face.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you considered your verdict?"

"We have, sir."

"And what is your verdict?"

"Guilty."

A shout from Manisty.

"It's a lie! It's a damned lie! I didn't do it!"

He was standing up, clutching at the shaky rail of the dock. His face was drained of color. He seemed to change, to shrivel as he stood there.

"Some one's behind it. Scarlett, Ruthven—how did they know so much? Why did they—"

Manisty stopped as if he had been choked. What was that they were putting on Sir Henry's head? This was the end, then. The end of ships and the sea, the end of yarns and drinks and harbor bars—the end of life itself. He was done for, all right. He'd never go down to Sydney any more, or see the girls dancing. Death . . . He felt very cold—so cold that his knees began to shake. The faces that stared at him grew blurred. He struggled to speak, but his white lips did not move.

There was a crash. Sweeping everyone from his path, Callaghan strode across the court. His hairy, calloused hand gripped Manisty's, holding it firmly in a tight hot grasp as they turned to face Sir Henry.

"Prisoner at the bar . . ."

IV

THE THREE weeks that must elapse before Manisty's death dragged away on leaden feet. Sir Henry had let it be known that any brawling would be visited with the utmost displeasure of the law. Also he had recommended that the witnesses stay on the spot in case new developments arose. Scarlett's eyes flickered when he heard this from Feuchter.

"Old Patterson's not very satisfied," confided God's gray rat. "He wouldn't go against the jury, of course. But between you and me, he's uneasy. For two pins he'd reopen the case."

"Do you think young Warrender will appeal?"

"He's got no grounds, unless fresh evidence comes up. There isn't a single cause why the sentence shouldn't stand. He couldn't even plead misdirection of the jury. Patterson favored Manisty in his summing up. Have another drink."

Scarlett pushed his glass across the table.

"Is it necessary for us to stay?" he asked carelessly. "Time's money. There's a load of copra waiting for me at Wakatea this very day."

"Better stay," advised Feuchter, wiping his baldish head with a pink bandana. "It would be—er—safer, perhaps."

Their eyes met. Scarlett thought, "He knows. I wonder how he found out?" Aloud he said—

"What do you mean—safer?"

"It might take some time to find you if fresh evidence came to hand," Feuchter explained smoothly. "And in any case. it looks bad if witnesses hurry away after a trial for murder."

Scarlett's face did not change.

"That fellow Torquil will lie up for me behind a tree most likely," he said. "We've never been exactly friends. Now, of course—" He shrugged.

"Yes, you'll do well to watch out for him," Feuchter agreed. "He's a dangerous fellow. I've seen him pick up a Kanaka and fling him into the lagoon like a rotten egg." His eyes swept over his own puny body, and a note of envy crept into his voice. "He's a bad one to cross, Scarlett. And that hairy Callaghan! Manisty's pal, eh? He reminds me of the bull of Bashan. He's fought so hard and lived so rough that he'd go through a brick wall and come out the other side still running hard. He and Torquil make a good pair, eh? As friends, of course. As enemies—not so good."

"What's your opinion of young Blaise?" said Scarlett.

"The weakest link in that chain," said Feuchter instantly. "If a man was trying to smash that company he'd do it through the youngster."

"He'd never go against Torquil."

"He'll never go anywhere—he'll always be driven by the thing that means most to him at the time. Just now it's Torquil. One day it'll be some one else. Possibly a woman."

There was a silence. The two of them were sitting in what Feuchter called his library. It was the only habitable room of his dirty little house. Around the walls were stacked books—books that had been slaved for, stolen, begged, even gambled for. They were his passion. This queer, ugly man with his rat's eyes and his warped, cunning brain loved his books with a savage affection that was not quite sane. A collector would have pinched himself on being shown into the stifling den. Here was the Vansittart copy of the "Areopagitica". Here, too, might be found the "Utopia" for which half America and all Europe had been ransacked by flustered bibliophiles. Under Feuchter's elbow lay a clumsy volume, with queer lettering and smudged woodcuts, the fourth of four copies on the entire globe. His eyes wandered to it lovingly.

"You're mad about your books," said Scarlett, following his gaze.

"I love them," Feuchter retorted. "Just as you love power, and Torquil loves his own strength."

He pushed the bottle forward.

"Have another finger. Don't spare it, don't spare it. This is a case of contraband that Patterson impounded. Plenty of it."

He waited till Scarlett lowered his glass again. The dark face was flushed. Feuchter was smoking. Thick bluish clouds almost obscured them from each other. Out of the haze came the lawyer's voice in a question.

"Has any one any idea what was in Moreau's box?"

"Why should any one know? Except Torquil, perhaps. Manisty can't take the stuff with him. He's most likely cached it somewhere safe."

"You know," remarked Feuchter conversationally, "it's wonderful to watch people in the witness box. Go into court tomorrow, Scarlett, and have a look at 'em. Watch their necks, and watch their hands. Never mind their faces. They aren't anything to go by. There was a fellow the other day, now. He gave his evidence without a flaw. Never turned a hair under questioning. Ah, but there was a little vein in the side of his neck that swelled and throbbed. That told me how he lied. That, and the way he kept his hands closed. Next time you tell a lie, Scarlett, take care to keep the palms of your hands wide open."

HE ROSE and straightened some books that lay on the floor, edging them into position with his foot.

"Where are you going next trip?" he asked.

"Wakatea. Loading there with copra for Kikia."

"You may get a good price for—for your stuff this time. If you do—"

"Well?"

"Don't shout like that. You make me nervous. I wonder if Moreau had time to be nervous?"

"You'd better ask Manisty."

Feuchter looked at him amiably.

"I'm asking—you," he said.

Scarlett moistened his lips.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said thickly. "The case is over. You know the verdict. It's thanks to you, mostly, that the verdict is—as it is. For God's sake, drop it."

"No use," Feuchter told him.

The glittering eyes stabbed into Scarlett's. With an effort he looked away.

"If you sell anything good while you're in Wakatea," said Feuchter, "you might spare a trifle for a poor friend. I've had a letter from Rosenbaum. He's in London at present, and there are one or two

books I'd like to have, if he can bid up for 'em at Southeby's."

"You'll get nothing out of me for your damned books. Look here, are you trying blackmail?"

"Blackmail? My dear Scarlett, you horrify me. I merely suggested—suggested, mind—a loan. Or, shall we say, a small present? After all—"

"And why should I give you a present?"

"Because," said Feuchter blandly, "you were a fool to choose Natui. The fellow is terrified of you and he has a bad memory. He came to me the night before he had to go in the witness box. He was frightened that he'd make some slip, so we had a little rehearsal. He thought he might forget what you had told him to say."

In the pause that followed, Scarlett's glass crashed to the floor.

"You can't prove it! It's a lie. I never told the fellow what to say—"

He realised that he was blustering like a caught novice. Natui! That fool! He'd flay him alive. Then he swung his mind round to grapple with the situation.

"I admit nothing," he said, working for time. "You can do what you like about it. If Natui came to you with a fake yarn like that why didn't you come to me about it? You'd have a job to explain your share to old Patterson. Conspiracy, Feuchter. Aiding and abetting, Feuchter. Perjury, Feuchter. Pretty names, eh?"

"Not so pretty as murder. If it came to a showdown, you'd lose."

Scarlett straddled across a worn chair, and bent forward.

"You won't get over me," he said. "No one's ever doublecrossed me and got away with it."

"You are not interested," Feuchter said. "I thought perhaps you would have helped me to buy those books. Maybe Torquil—"

"He hasn't a cent."

"No? Then it is of no use trying him. I wonder if I could interest Miss Ruthven?"

"Leave her out of it!"

"How sharp you are. Why should she not be interested? But perhaps she knows very little about books. Perhaps, too, she knows very little about Moreau's death—except that it unfortunately occurred?"

"She knows nothing."

Feuchter smiled.

"No doubt she would be pleased to know the facts."

"Don't speak to her," said Scarlett savagely. "I'll break your neck if you do."

"Threats," murmured Feuchter softly. "Threats of bodily harm. So you'd rather I didn't mention Natui's evidence to her?"

Scarlett knew when he was cornered. He rose, dusting his legs. Cost what it might, the matter must be kept from Gillian.

"It's blackmail," he told the grinning Feuchter. "Blackmail, do you hear? And I'll get you for it one day."

"We needn't quarrel. A business arrangement, that's all."

"How much do you want?" said Scarlett bluntly.

"One-third."

"My God. You don't want much, do you?"

"One-third," repeated Feuchter. "And whatever you get for—whatever you sell at Wakatea, I'll know just what the price is. If I think you've cheated me, look out!"

Scarlett reached for his hat and pulled it on slowly. Better appear to submit. If he balked at this stage, Feuchter would have it all in court most likely. The chap was erratic, undependable.

"Very well," he said at the door. "One-third. But if you open your trap, Feuchter . . ."

He left the sentence unfinished. Feuchter watched him walk away, and rubbed his hands with a quiet, fierce enjoyment.

CHAPTER II

TORQUIL'S WAY

RUTHVEN'S sister, Gillian, sat on the deck of the *Flying Spaniard*, reading a month old newspaper with an air of boredom. Presently she tossed her head impatiently and flung the crumpled sheet aside.

For a year now she had sailed with her brother and Scarlett—the beauty and strangeness of the southern seas putting off from week to week her settling down with missionary friends she had known in Scotland.

Sitting on deck with the crumpled newspaper by her side, she cupped her chin in her hands and looked across the lagoon at the green and brown and white of Amanu. The first careless gaiety which she had felt on entering this new life had faded. In its place lurked an odd feeling of uneasiness. Her brother was the same, of course. Well, almost the same. It must be just her fancy that he was—afraid of Scarlett.

Scarlett—she could not explain why she had grown to dislike him. His manners were perfect. He treated her with courtesy. Yet, somehow, she was beginning to avoid him. Perhaps it was his eyes that disturbed her—his black, intent eyes that followed every movement she made.

This business of Moreau's death puzzled her. The men refused to discuss it before her. When she spoke of Manisty they made no comment. Nor would they discuss Torquil. She knew of their hatred for him. Months ago in Port Edward Island she had witnessed a curious little encounter. Torquil and Blaise had passed Scarlett in the street and she had seen the black looks that they shot at each other. Blaise had stopped, his face flushed and angry, and Torquil had jerked him on again with a muttered caution. Puzzled, she had questioned a taciturn Scarlett, with poor results. The incident had escaped her memory until Torquil's name was mentioned in connection with Manisty and the dead Moreau.

She became aware of a shadow on the deck, and looked up to meet Scarlett's eyes. For some unknown reason she felt confused.

"Coming ashore?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Just as well, perhaps," he said. "Amanu isn't very pleasant these days. Torquil and his lot—well, they're hot about all this business."

She did not look up.

"Of course. Manisty was their friend."

"Manisty was found guilty."

"Yes. I suppose that scrap of cloth that matched his shirt was what convicted him."

Scarlett was terse—

"Naturally. It was found in the dead man's hand."

Gillian wrinkled her forehead.

"Couldn't it have been placed there by some one else? Suppose—"

He caught her up quickly.

"Suppose what?"

"Suppose some one else had done it," she said simply.

"You mean some one might have killed Moreau and found that scrap of stuff by chance?"

"And put it in the dead man's fingers," she suggested.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly. But—who? Anyway, the thing's over now. Forget it . . . You're not coming ashore?"

"No."

He left her then, and shouted for the longboat to be made ready to row across the lagoon.

It was sunset and already the island had assumed that mysterious air that falls in the short, sharp dusk. The wind had quieted. Long black shadows stole across the beach. Slowly the lagoon changed from fiery gold to indigo. Every sound was intensified in the evening stillness.

Scarlett's boots crunched the sand underfoot with a noise that startled the silence.

IVES RUTHVEN had not come. He had been left on board because, on hearing what had passed between Scarlett and Feuchter, he had announced his immediate intention of settling the latter for good and all. His quick temper had blazed at Scarlett's tale, told with deliberate casualness over whisky. It had taken nearly an hour to quiet him. Finally Scarlett had dared him to come ashore in his present mood. He had done what he very seldom did with Ruthven—stared at him until the other was forced to meet his eyes. It was a mastery that never failed. With all his muscle, Ruthven had a large streak of the animal in him—the animal that can be subdued by his master's glance. Strong as Scarlett was, Ruthven could have broken the smaller man over his knee. Yet he knew—they both knew—that, in spite of a sullen resentment that he could not conquer, Ruthven was the man, and the other the master.

So he had stayed aboard with Gillian, while Scarlett went ashore on this queer, silent evening that seemed to hold the presage of a storm. A beach hen scuttled away with loud squawks as Scarlett strode toward Miller's. A late parrot screeched among the palms that clustered behind Feuchter's house. Some one was coming down the road. By the swing of the body Scarlett knew it was Torquil. A dozen paces apart, they halted, straining in the half light to see each other's faces. Then Scarlett strode on doggedly—till a pair of bare, sinewy arms stopped him.

"Let me pass." It was their first encounter since the sentence five days before. Scarlett's lips drew back in a snarl. "Out of the way, you fool!"

For answer Torquil's fist caught him on the jaw. He staggered back. Then, regaining his balance, he stood swaying for a moment, staring at Torquil through a scarlet blur. With a sound that came from the back of his throat he sprang at the menacing figure. They closed, their straining bodies lashing to and fro like the locked bodies of two wolves. It was the first time they had tested each other's muscles. Torquil discovered that his adversary had a body of steel. Scarlett hit to kill every time. There was no wild rain of blows, but a grim succession of calculated crashes from a fist that might have belonged to a man half a head taller. Their breath began to come hard and fast. The rising moon showed their faces, bloody, determined, vengeful. Torquil drew back and let out his right like a stone from a catapult. The shorter man swayed, coughing. So absorbed were they that they did not hear the sound of footsteps hurrying down the beach road.

"Stop it! Stop, Torquil!"

Callaghan's arms fastened around Torquil, holding him back. Purcell had hold of Scarlett. The two struggled furiously to escape.

"What the hell's up?" demanded Miller, who came panting up with a lantern. "One of the boys told us you were scrappin'. 'Strewth, look at Scarlett's face! Keep still, both of you. Do you want Patterson to clap you into jail? You know what he said about brawlin'."

"Murderer," snarled Torquil, straining to reach Scarlett. "Manisty's going to swing because of you."

"He's guilty," Scarlett gasped. He wiped his mouth and face on the rag that Purcell thrust into his hand. "Been proved guilty."

"Framed," retorted the other. "I'll get you for it, Scarlett. By God, I'll get you for it!"

By the light of Miller's lantern they got Torquil to the store. Scarlett went lurching down to the water's edge, while Purcell rounded up his boys. They came running at last, and piled into the longboat. Presently the oars rose and fell as they sped across the lagoon. The men of Amanu had blown up part of the reef to make an entrance for ships. The *Flying Spaniard* lay at ease on the dark water, and Gillian's voice drifted to the rowers. Scarlett sat in the bows, taciturn, morose. Torquil was strong. Probably

he was stronger even than Ruthven. What had Feuchter said? "As enemies, not so good." Torquil and Callaghan . . . He nursed his bruised arm in silence.

He climbed aboard with difficulty. All his body was one vast ache. Ruthven, coming on deck at the touch of the long-boat against the ship, was startled at his white face under the deck lights.

"Hullo—what's up?"

"Whisky," said Scarlett hoarsely.

He slithered down the companion and almost fell through the doorway into the cabin. Ruthven shouted to the galley for Pau Tiau to bring hot coffee. Scarlett sagged on to a chest and leaned back against the wall. The light of the hanging lamp lighted up his battered face.

"What happened?" demanded Ruthven, pouring brandy into a steaming cup. "Lord, you're a wreck. Who was it?"

Scarlett took a gulp at the liquid and coughed. The color began to seep back into his cheeks.

"Torquil."

"Oh, Torquil," repeated Ruthven thoughtfully. Then, "Did you lay him out?"

"Some fool stopped me."

"Lucky for you," Ruthven said. "He's tough."

"He's lying up for me," said Scarlett, feverishly. "He's a killer. We ought to get away."

It was Ruthven, the hothead, who saw the unwisdom of such a step.

"Too risky," he said. "Here, have a drop more. No good to try a getaway yet. Too suspicious. We can't go yet." He paused. "Besides, I'll bet they're standing watch on us—Callaghan and Blaise and Torquil, I mean. Hullo, Gillian."

Gillian came forward into the light. She was wearing a frock of some thin blue stuff with little flowers worked on it. Her gray-blue eyes went to Scarlett's face.

"Oh, what has happened?"

"Nothing. A scrap, that's all."

"Look at your sleeve," said Gillian. "Hi, Pau Tiau, you fetchem one fella dish all full up water. Ives, fetch me a towel or something. Oh, Lord, of course I should have this frock on!"

RUTHVEN and the boy fled to do her bidding. Under her direction scissors were fetched and bandages hunted for. While Ruthven pinned a towel round her waist she slit up Scarlett's sleeve near the seam and began sponging the bruised flesh where the blood had clotted.

"Iodine," said Gillian. "It'll sting, but it's better to be on the safe side; and that's the only antiseptic we've got."

She made a little pad of bandage and soaked it. It burned like seven devils and Scarlett gritted his teeth. Already she was winding the bandage round and round his arm.

"Too tight?"

He shook his head.

"That ought to be all right. You'd better go and lie down."

Her eyes sought Ruthven's.

"How did it happen?"

"Torquil," said her brother. "We'll hear more about it tomorrow."

"Torquil!"

"He laid for me," Scarlett said. "He's trying to get me because of Manisty."

"Why, you couldn't help all that about Manisty," protested Gillian. "You just happened to be the ones that brought him to justice. How soon can we get away?"

"Not yet," said Ruthven. "And when we do, he'll follow us."

"Torquil?"

There was silence. Scarlett's mind battered at the problem in vain. They were like rats in a trap. The *Peregrine* would never let them get away. They might lie idle for a month, and Torquil would lie idle, too, watching them night and day until they weighed anchor.

"Yes," said Ruthven. "This ship's being watched, I tell you. As soon as we weigh anchor, the *Peregrine* will be on our heels. Just wait till we're clear of

Amanu and then watch out for the fun."

"It's our skin or his," said Scarlett.

Both men rose as Gillian went out. When she had gone, Scarlett said:

"You're right about the *Flying Spaniard* being watched. Every night there's some one up by the jail walls. From there you can see every ship coming or going. Friend Manisty provides a nice excuse. He likes to think some one's on the other side of the wall. Oh, yes—" savagely—"Manisty's a damn fine excuse —for a nice little killing."

His arm pained him. He rubbed at the bandages and swore.

"I'm damned if we'll hang around here till Manisty swings. I don't care what Feuchter, or Patterson, or any one else says. There's absolutely no reason why we should stop. The case will never be reopened. There aren't any fresh developments to occur. The only possible danger was Natui. Now we've got the fool safe in the hold we've nothing to worry about."

"It isn't wise to go. We're watched. They'd be after us in half an hour."

Ruthven stared at Scarlett's frowning face, his restless, drumming fingers.

"You've got the wind up. That's queer, for you," he observed. "They're like cats watching a rat hole. They'd follow us, and we don't want 'em around till we've—"

"Careful!"

"Till we've unloaded the goods," said Ruthven. "If we can get to Tungas we're safe."

"A couple of days' start would do us," Scarlett reflected. "Manisty's got to have three Sundays. The last one will be the 22nd. They'll hang him the 23rd or 24th. The *Peregrine* will stay here while he's alive."

"What's to stop us from going, then?"

"If we went now we wouldn't stand a chance. They'd be in Tungas as soon as we were."

"If they got us, most likely Manisty wouldn't need a funeral for a bit."

"Exactly. That's why we can't run the risk. Now see here. I reckon they'll hang Manisty on the 24th. Patterson will want to keep him alive till the last minute, so it won't be the 23rd. The *padre* goes to Wakatea on the 25th by the monthly steamer. I know that because Feuchter told me. So most likely they'll have the—the show on the 24th." He paused. "If we could slip out on the night of the 22nd—"

"Well?"

"They wouldn't leave Manisty then. It would be too late by the 23rd. They'd feel they'd have to stay until the next day. You get me?"

"Why not leave it till the 23rd?"

"Because they might hang him that day, you fool. We can't tell for certain. Patterson's the only one who knows the date. He'll keep it close for fear of trouble."

Ruthven nodded.

"Well," said Scarlett, "I'm going to turn in."

II

BLAISE was moody. He mooned about the beach, lounging in and out of Miller's like a lost dog. The endless waiting got on his nerves. Callaghan and Torquil were silent these days. They shunned company. They refused to discuss the Manisty affair with any one. Blaise knew that they hoped against hope that something would happen. He, with the fatalism of youth, believed that Manisty would die.

They had been to see Manisty. He had been brought to them in the dingy waiting room of the prison by two huge police boys, who had stood grimly at the door with their hands on their guns. Manisty had altered. He looked ill and tired. His eyes wandered again and again to the window where the sky showed. The wind blew in and he opened his palms stealthily to feel it. All of them had felt stiff and dumb, unable to do more than blurt out a few jerky sentences. Presently Callaghan rumbled:

"Cheer up. We may get a break yet. We been in tight places before this."

Manisty had laughed shakily. He shivered slightly and tried to fling up his

head as if he didn't care. But neither he nor Callaghan could speak again. It was left to Torquil to say what had to be said about Scarlett. He was in the middle of it when Jackson, the white warder, told them their time was up. Somehow they were outside the walls again, bewildered, embarrassed, and Callaghan was striding away from them like a sleep walker.

That was three days ago. Since then Blaise had felt weighted down by this thing that must happen. The thought of it lay over him like a shadow. His mind was dull, heavy, jaded with all the emotions that the past weeks had called forth. Desperately he longed for some relief. He took to going for long walks into the interior, away up past Cantle's plantations toward the heart of Amanu. He tired himself out, and yet he could not sleep at night.

About four o'clock he went into Miller's and swallowed some grenadine which that worthy recommended.

" 'Ad it in fer Sir 'Enry. 'E likes a drop now an' then. Me, I can't get it down. But there—you're young. You ain't carin' much what you drink just now. You try it."

So Blaise tried it and thought secretly it wasn't half bad. However, he made suitable remarks to Miller and planked down his money. After that there seemed nothing to do. Torquil and Callaghan had gone aboard the *Peregrine* to see to some repairs. Blaise sauntered down the beach road, scuffling his feet like a bored schoolboy. Just beyond the thick clump of palms he came upon Gillian.

For a moment he stood quite still, watching the graceful poise of her body as she leaned against a tree. Since the day of Manisty's trial he had seen her several times at a distance. He realized that he had been thinking about her a lot. He remembered seeing her once before on Port Edward Island. What had Torquil said about women? Blaise felt his heart beating quickly. How beautiful she was!

When she moved he could see the soft outline of her throat against the dark wood. The sight stirred him curiously. To hide his emotion from himself he lighted a cigaret. At the quick spurt of the match she turned and saw him.

Their eyes met. Blaise forgot the lighted match until it burned him and he dropped it hastily. Gillian laughed, in spite of her determination to crush this wide eyed youth.

"Hell!" Blaise exclaimed. "Sorry, but it hurt."

He sucked his scorched finger gravely, and Gillian smiled again.

"I hope it wasn't the last," she said.

"Plenty more," he assured her. Then he remembered that she didn't know his name. He said awkwardly, "My name's Blaise. I suppose you won't have a cigaret?"

"Why not?" she said, and took one from the pack he proffered.

HE LIGHTED it for her, and felt a tremor as she leaned toward him. The soft, flowered stuff of her dress swayed in the breeze as she drew back again.

"I'm Gillian Ruthven," she told him. "But you know that, I suppose. Just as I knew that your name was Blaise."

"You've heard Scarlett talk about us, I reckon. About Torquil and Callaghan and—Manisty. We're on different sides." He hesitated. "Perhaps you'd rather I didn't talk to you?"

"Please don't go," she said quickly. "After all, it's not our quarrel, is it? I'd like to have some one to talk to," she added wistfully. "Scarlett and my brother haven't much time for me just now."

Blaise's face lighted up.

"Really? I can't tell you how much I've wanted to speak to you. Only, I thought you wouldn't like it."

There was something humble about him. He looked such a boy, with his nervous, fumbling hands, and his eyes that never left hers. Gillian leaned back against the palm tree under which she was resting, and said—

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you," said Blaise.

Almost timidly he came and sat down, six feet away from her. He looked very young, with his tousled hair and troubled brown eyes. For a long time he sat there, tongue-tied. She waited. Presently he said, with an effort—

"This is awfully kind of you."

"What?"

"Letting me stay here with you. I've wanted this to happen for ages."

"Have you?"

"Yes."

Gillian said:

"You're very shy. You haven't met many women, have you?"

Blaise considered.

"I've cared a lot about one."

"Tell me about her."

"A skipper's wife. I was fourteen, maybe. The Old Man was a beast. *Georgina*, his boat was, after his wife. A rotten old tub, that boat, but just about fit for him. They say there's some good in every one, but there wasn't any in him."

"And she?"

"She could hold her own. She was as tall as he was, with black hair parted in the middle, and eyes that went right through you. I stuck it for six months because of her."

"Was she kind to you?"

"Kind!" echoed Blaise, bitterly. "She used to put her arms round me sometimes, and laugh at me. I reckon she knew I loved her. She'd stroke my hair and pinch my cheek, now and then. She was as tall and strong as a man, and I thought she was the loveliest thing in the world. One day I made her sore, some way, and she beat me half to death."

"That cured you?"

"No. It didn't seem to matter what she did. I loved her all the time. Then, one day when we were in Sydney harbor, the Old Man came aboard drunk. It wasn't often he'd touch her, but he did that night. He hit her in the face. We were in the galley and I was peeling potatoes. I went for him with my knife. I can't remember anything that happened after that. He must have taken me ashore when he'd finished, and dropped me on some wharf. I never saw him again."

Before Gillian's eyes rose the picture of a ship's boy, springing to the defense of the handsome, stalwart woman who had tormented him.

"The most beautiful woman I ever saw," Blaise said, "except you."

He was not looking at her. His fingers were busy, digging holes in the sand and then filling them up. A wind crept up from the lagoon and set her dress fluttering.

"I think perhaps I'll walk as far as the point before I go back to the ship," said Gillian. "It's cooler now."

He was on his feet, helping her to rise. His hand took hers, and she felt its strength—the untried strength of youth that knows not what it challenges.

"May I come with you?" he asked, almost timidly.

"If you like," she told him carelessly.

He walked beside her, talking easily now, of trivial things. His first shyness had worn off. She smiled and questioned and sympathized, until he spoke as naturally as though they had grown up together. She perceived his sensitiveness, his humility, his utter ignorance of his own charm.

They were passing a scrambling jasmine, and he pulled one of the wax-like blooms for her.

"It makes me think of you," he said. "It's so white and so sweet. Do you know the legend the people here tell about it? Torquil and I heard it—"

She caught at that name.

"Torquil— Blaise, please don't tell him that—that—"

"That I met you? Why not?"

"He wouldn't understand," she said. "He'd remind you that I'm in the enemy's camp. I've enjoyed this afternoon. It's been so—peaceful. But he would stop you from seeing me any more."

"Why should he?" he cried angrily, knowing it was true. Then, after a moment he went on, "I won't tell him. I can't stop seeing you—Gillian."

"Don't you want to?"
His face was quite white.
"No. I couldn't bear it—"

III

ON THE twenty-first Torquil said to Miller—

"Something's up with young Blaise."

"What do you mean?"

"He's all up or else all down. Think he's fretting about Manisty?"

"No. Just young, that's all. You're like a hen with one chick over that boy. Leave 'im go a bit more. You've kept 'im on your apron strings long enough."

"Look here—"

"There's lots of white folks on this island, an' there's some damn pretty women knockin' about," Miller reminded him. "The young fool's in love with some woman of forty-five, most likely."

In love. Blaise in love! Torquil bit on his pipe. Well, of course the boy would fall for it some time. But not now. Not with the shadow of Manisty's death hanging over them all. He looked up as Blaise sauntered into Miller's bar.

"Hullo."

"Where've you been?"

"What the hell does it matter to you where I've been?"

"Don't answer me like that. You're always mooning away by yourself these days."

"Well, what's the use of sticking around where you and Callaghan are? You don't need me," said Blaise irritably.

"Touch of sun," said Miller to Torquil. "Buck up, laddie. I'll mix you a pick-me-up."

"Don't want it," Blaise growled at him.

"You'll damn well drink it," interposed Torquil. "Mix it up, Miller."

Blaise swallowed it at a draft and went out into the sunshine.

He was going to meet Gillian, and his heart beat fast. Since that first encounter he had met her twice. The time was drawing near when he must say goodby. The thought frightened him. She was continually in his mind. In vain he reminded himself that she was in the enemy's camp, that he was playing the traitor to Torquil by even speaking to her. Yet he could not put her out of his heart.

He went toward the clustering palms that grew behind the straggling village. Among the dark trees he caught a glimpse of a blue dress, and his heart began to beat furiously. When he reached her he could only say stupidly, "Hullo," and stand like a fool, hands hanging by his sides.

At his voice Gillian turned, smiling. She liked this boy with the brown eyes and sudden, shy smile. In silence they walked toward the higher ground, where a little stream of water ran down the hill. It was a still, blue day. From the reef came the dull boom of the breakers. A fruit pigeon flashed past, and Gillian turned to watch its bright flight.

"You like those birds?" said Blaise.

"It's all wonderful to me," she told him. "In Scotland—well, it's different. All this color, and the sun, the warmth—it's something I can never get enough of. Every day it seems more marvelous. Don't you feel the same way?"

"No," he said heavily. "I've known it for so long that I don't notice it, I reckon."

Her face clouded at a sudden thought.

"We'll have to be careful," she told him. "Scarlett seemed very curious to know where I was going this morning. If he found out that I'd come to meet you, I don't know what he'd do. Lock me in my cabin, very likely."

"He wouldn't dare!"

"Wouldn't he? You don't know him."

THEY strolled on, and presently Gillian laughed and began to talk of other things. For an hour they sauntered, young, carefree, enjoying each other's company. Gillian shook off the faint malaise which seized her every time she thought of Scarlett, and gave herself up to the pleasure of the moment. It was good to be able to bring such a light into the boy's eyes. He forgot his bashfulness, and talked

freely, speaking of his ambitions, his hopes, his admiration for Torquil. She listened with queer, maternal pity that she could neither explain nor understand.

Presently he said casually—

"Would you like to sit down for a bit?"

He waited while she seated herself, then lay down at her feet, propping himself up on his elbows, so that he could look up at her.

"It's awfully good of you to bother about me," he said. "This morning's been great. When can I see you again?"

"I don't think I can come again," said Gillian reluctantly.

He went white.

"It's dangerous," the girl explained. "Scarlett and my brother are suspicious of everything. I had hard work to get ashore this morning. I'm afraid they'll follow me one day."

"But, Gillian—"

"In a few days we'll be sailing. And then, most likely, we shan't ever meet again. I think we'd better stop seeing each other before you—before you—"

"Once more," he begged. "Only once. If you're afraid to come in the daytime, come at night. One of the boys could row you in."

She thought quickly.

"There's Natui. Scarlett doesn't allow him on shore, since he gave evidence. I think he's afraid your boys will fight him. But if he could get ashore for a bit, he'd be glad. Yes, I think I could trust him to bring me and say nothing about it."

"Then you'll come—just to say good-by?"

"Yes."

He took her hand and she felt his lips on her fingers.

"Tomorrow night?"

"No. They're going to be ashore, playing cards. It would be too risky."

"Then tonight? That would be better. I'm on watch then."

He explained, flushing, apologetic, how he and Callaghan and Torquil in turn watched the *Flying Spaniard* from outside the prison wall at night.

"Tonight, then," said Gillian.

"Where will you come?" Blaise asked.

"Nowhere near the town. It's dangerous."

"What about the other side of the point?"

A mile away, the point. On the other side of it a bay curved into the land.

"That'll do," said Gillian. "Isn't there a palm tree that stands by itself near the water? Wouldn't that be a good place?"

"Yes."

"I'll come," she promised. "It may be late—twelve, very likely. You'll wait?"

"I'll wait till morning," he promised.

"Then I'll come. Natui will bring me in the longboat. But I may be very late. Sometimes they sit up playing cards till two. Now I must go."

He helped her to rise, his blood tingling at the touch of her fingers. In silence he watched as the slim, graceful figure moved away through the trees toward the village. He himself waited for another half hour before he strolled down to Miller's.

In the bar he found the usual group of idlers. They were saying that Manisty would die on the 24th. Feuchter had had it from Sir Henry himself.

"And it's the 21st today," Purcell said. "Manisty ain't got much time."

BLAISE went down over the hot sand and shouted for Maro. The boy came running from a grass hut above the beach. He had been drinking *kava* and his head rolled stupidly. Blaise pushed him into the boat and thrust the oars into the limp hands. They began to row out to the *Peregrine*. Under the afternoon sun the lagoon lay like enchanted water. Peering down, Blaise could see a thousand gold and crimson fishes scuttling away from the shadow of the oar. All the strange feathery vegetation of the lagoon's bed lay clear and sharp below him. A whip eel slid out from a clump of coral. A giant clam moved his deadly lip. Blaise lifted his eyes and stared at the white, receding shore, the palms blowing in the wind. The beauty of the south stung his heart.

Color, color, everywhere—the hot, savage color of earth and the lusting sea. Blaise had never seen the world in this light before.

They were at the *Peregrine* and Callaghan's shock head was looking down at them. Blaise swung himself aboard and answered the other's questions sulkily.

"Don't jaw so damn much. I'm feeling like hell."

He went below, heedless of Callaghan's prescription of wet towels, and flung himself on his bunk. He kicked off his boots and lay back on the blankets, his arms behind his head. Presently Callaghan looked in, and went away again, believing him asleep.

But he was not asleep. He was thinking of Gillian Ruthven.

The day wore away and evening came. The wind freshened and on the scented air the crash of breakers on the reef. Along the beach fires began to burn. A sound of soft singing broke the silence of the coming night. In the harbor ship's riding lights appeared. From the open door of Miller's bar came throaty laughter, as Blaise rowed ashore.

Toward ten o'clock the fires died down. The singing ceased. Miller flung out the town's sot, Bill Redvers, and slammed the door. By eleven Amanu was asleep.

The jail at Amanu stands on a rise overlooking the lagoon. Its flat white walls show up well in the moonlight. Torquil and Callaghan, turning in early aboard the *Peregrine*, glanced at it in silence before they went below. How many more hours had Manisty to live? . . .

Up by the prison wall Blaise stared into the darkness. His heart beat more quickly as he watched the last light go out. He remembered how Gillian had looked, how she had flashed suddenly into a smile as she agreed to come. All day he had thought of her, stealing toward him in the quiet night . . .

He straightened himself and looked at the ship's riding lights on the water. With unsteady hands he brushed down his clothes and smoothed his rumpled hair. Slowly, slowly, he began to walk away from the gaunt white wall, behind which Manisty lay. He gained the shadow of the nearest palms, and his taut body relaxed a little. When he found his feet on the path that led to the point he began to hurry.

He pushed on, following the path until he came to the point. The spot lay out of sight of any ship in the harbor. With restless, hurrying feet he began to run, straining his eyes to make out any sign of a boat drawn up on the beach.

But no one was waiting by the lone palm. Blaise flung himself down on the ground and tried to calm himself. He was early, of course. Good thing, too. It would have been awful if she had had to wait there for him.

He sat up, his face flushed, his eager eyes shining as he waited for Gillian to come.

AT SUNDOWN on the 21st Scarlett was pacing restlessly up and down the deck. Ruthven watched him from the bows, where he sat smoking. A thin blue spiral curled lazily upward in the still air. The Scotsman's blue eyes were uneasy, but he did not speak. He had learned that silence was the wisest course when Scarlett fell into one of these moods.

"Ruthven!"

"Well?"

"We'll sail tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Yes. This waiting about—it gets on my nerves."

"We'll be seen," objected Ruthven.

"We'll have a start, anyway," said Scarlett, recklessly. "I'm damned if I'll wait here another night. What are you afraid of? Afraid some one will put a bullet into you? Wouldn't matter if they did!"

"Chuck that!" said Ruthven, raising his great body from the coil of rope on which he had been sitting. "What's the matter with you, eh? I think it's damn risky making a getaway. But we may as well try tonight as any other. I'm like you—I'm fed up with this waiting."

"You look it," Scarlett told him.

Ruthven colored at the contempt in the other's voice.

"Stow that talk," he said angrily. "Torquil and Callaghan haven't ruined any night for *me*," he added significantly.

Scarlett did not answer. He brushed past Ruthven and went down the companion. He found Gillian below, sitting idle, an open book on the floor beside her. His sudden entrance startled her. It was almost dark and they could not read each other's faces. But both of them were intensely aware of electricity in the air. Gillian spoke first.

"How you startled me!" she said, with a laugh that struck him as not quite natural.

"We're sailing tonight."

For a moment she did not understand. Then he heard her catch her breath.

"Oh, but why? I thought we had to wait until after the—execution."

"Did you? Well, we're not waiting any more."

"But—"

"You don't seem to realize that this place isn't big enough for Torquil and me, Gillian. If we stay here any longer, I'll have to kill him—or be killed."

His tone frightened her. She had a vision of Torquil and Scarlett, fighting.

"I do realize," she assured him.

He nodded, and drew away from her. A boy was coming in to light the lamp. It was Natui. Scarlett said to him—

"All boy aboard?"

"All boy," Natui answered, busy with matches.

"You tellem all same get ready sail bimeby night time."

"Bimeby night time, Sekeleti?"

"Yes."

Scarlett waited until the boy had gone before he spoke again. The lamp smoked and he put up a hand to lower the wick. Without looking at Gillian, he said—

"There's something I want to ask you about."

"Yes?" A note of cold hostility crept into her voice.

His eyes grew dangerous.

"Pau Tiau came to me with a yarn this morning. He told me he'd seen you with young Blaise."

She lifted her eyes haughtily.

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it! It's damn disloyal to—your brother. Do you think it's right that you and our enemy should be friends?"

"Blaise is no one's enemy."

"He belongs to the *Peregrine*, and that's enough," retorted Scarlett. "What did you talk about, eh?"

"It's no business of yours."

The blood rushed to Scarlett's face, but he kept his voice admirably under control.

"How many times have you met him?"

"It can't possibly interest you."

"That means several times. You can't lie to me. When were you going to see him again?"

SHE set her mouth in a stubborn red line.

"I see," said Scarlett. "And just what has he got out of you in these talks? How much have you told him?"

She rose at his tone.

"Told him—about what? What is there to tell? If you think I'm in love with him, you're wrong. I'm not. He's young, and I'm sorry for him."

A flood of pity swept over her as she pictured the boy's long vigil on the other side of the point. He had told her he would wait for her till dawn . . .

"You're sorry for him, and you're going to see him again," said Scarlett, watching her. "Is that it? When did you plan to meet him? Tonight, eh?"

The flaming color in her cheeks told him he had guessed right.

"Ah! Well, he can cool his heels instead. I suppose it's his watch outside the jail. A pretty scheme, on my word! Are you mad? Did you think no one would see you?"

"We weren't—" began Gillian, and stopped.

He fastened on the words.

"You weren't going to meet outside the

jail, then? You were going to meet him somewhere else?"

She did not answer. Her mutinous eyes looked scornfully away.

Scarlett thought quickly. He must change his tune if he wanted to find out where Blaise was waiting.

"It's no use raising hell about it, Gillian. I don't want to hurt you over this. I don't think you realize what a hole Ruthven and I are in, or you wouldn't have done what you have. I can't put off sailing until tomorrow. I've made up my mind, and what I say goes. Where's the lad going to wait? If there's time, I'll get a message to him."

"Will you?" She spoke eagerly, coming nearer to him, her eyes dark with pleading. "Will you really? He's such a kid, and I can't bear to think of him waiting all night. Could Natui go?"

"Natui—was he going to take you?"

She stiffened at his tone.

"I don't believe you're going to send Blaise word at all."

"Where is he going to wait?" Scarlett said, impatiently. "Tell me."

Gillian said angrily—

"Find out."

A thought struck Scarlett.

"Natui was taking you. He'll know—and he'll tell me."

"He won't!"

"He'll tell me anything I want to know after five minutes," Scarlett said grimly. "If he doesn't—"

He did not finish the sentence, but Gillian understood.

"There's no need to torture Natui," she said coldly. "If you must know, I was going to meet Blaise on the other side of the point."

"The point! And he's going to wait till you come?"

"Yes."

"By God, what luck!" cried Scarlett. "We'll leave 'em squatting here with their hooks in the mud!"

Gillian went up to him, a desperate appeal in her eyes.

"Sail tomorrow. What difference can it make? Blaise mustn't be treated like this. Oh, I know you think I'm in love with him, but I'm not."

"We sail tonight."

"But why? What's at the bottom of it? Why are you running away like this? Afraid of Torquil! Is that it?"

He flushed at the scorn in her voice.

"Watch what you say to me!" he warned her, his voice trembling.

"Why not!" Gillian cried recklessly. "There's something queer about all this. Are you hiding something from me?"

"No," Scarlett said quickly. "No."

"Then—"

"Be quiet," he said, coldly. "The matter's settled, Gillian. We're sailing tonight."

He turned to go, but paused to fling a last remark over his shoulder.

"Even if we weren't sailing, do you think you'd meet Blaise tonight?"

IV

SCARLETT ordered sacks to be used to break the sound of hauling the chain. He brought more sacks and laid each coil of the chain on its bed as it crawled over the side of the *Flying Spaniard* like a snake. Every light aboard had been put out. Like ghosts in the moonless night the men moved about their tasks. They must go slowly, slowly. The offshore breeze that comes with sunset still held. The ship crawled down the harbor under Ruthven's hands. They passed two boats that had come in three days ago with copra. Past the sleeping ships they went, on toward the opening in the lagoon which led to the sea. Every inch of the way must be felt. Ruthven's hands on the wheel were wet. His breath came with a whistling sound as he strained his eyes in the darkness. The boom of the waves grew louder on the left. The *Flying Spaniard* began to sway a little.

"Go easy," came Scarlett's hoarse whisper. "Port your helm—not so much, you fool!"

They could make out a pale spatter of white where the combers leaped at the reef and fell back in a hissing beat of foam.

The noise bewildered Ruthven. Under his unsteady guidance the ship yawed sickeningly. Scarlett cursed and wrenched the wheel from his hands. That was Ruthven in a crisis. The fellow couldn't be depended upon. He was yellow . . .

"Get out!" Scarlett snarled at him. "Stand away, you—you—"

Under his hands the *Flying Spaniard* nosed her way toward the opening. There appeared a break in the dim, scarcely seen line of white. Scarlett's instinct seized the moment. He swung the *Flying Spaniard* round. She cleared the opening with four feet to spare on the port side. It had been a close thing.

He wiped his forehead and jerked Ruthven's arm.

"Take her," he said briefly, and went to swear at the Kankas who were already hoisting the mainsail—no easy job in the dark.

Scarlett hauled at the rope with the boys. All his body was wet with the strain through which he had just passed. When the sail bellied to the wind, and the *Flying Spaniard* hurried forward, he went to where Ruthven held the wheel, in hands grown steady now that the danger was past.

"In a damn funk, weren't you?"

Ruthven growled deep in his throat.

"You're always like that when it comes to the pinch. That's why we've never pulled off anything big. That's why that affair at Wakatea didn't come off. That's why we let the *Saint Anne* slip through our fingers. You'd have had us on the reef tonight, too."

Ruthven did not answer. That sneering voice cut him like a whip—but he did not speak. He tensed his great muscles; some day he would break Scarlett like a match . . .

When Scarlett had gone, he gripped the wheel more tightly. One day he'd have a reckoning with that fellow. Yes, he'd take him up in his two hands and smash him down on the deck—smash him down again and again, till every bone in his body was broken. The rage he felt made him drive the ship recklessly.

SCARLETT went below to find Gillian. As he entered the cabin she looked up quickly.

"Are we outside yet?"

He nodded.

"Aye. We're away all right, thanks to you."

"It's so dark there wouldn't have been any danger if Blaise *had* been watching."

"He'd have seen the riding light go out. He knew where we were lying."

She shrugged and looked away.

"I know it's hard lines on young Blaise," Scarlett said carelessly. "But don't pity him too much. He's young; he'll live through it."

"It hurts just the same."

"I suppose you didn't fall in love with that kid?"

"No. But I don't think I've ever felt so rotten in my life. I feel almost as if I'd been a party to a conspiracy."

"What if you had been?" said Scarlett angrily. "You belong to the *Flying Spaniard*, don't you? Why shouldn't you work against them?"

He kicked a coil of rope off a stool and sat down. Reaction showed in his limp shoulders, his restless, twitching hands.

"You're thinking about that Blaise. Hell, is he the only man in the world to lose a woman? Don't you think I've ever lost one?"

"No," said Gillian suddenly.

He stared at her, then smiled.

"You're right, there. I never have. Perhaps it's because I've never wanted one very badly. It's a sure recipe. The Chinese say that to despise a thing is to possess it. I've found that very true with women."

The ship was beginning to roll. Overhead came the sound of feet running hastily. Ruthven was shouting some order. Scarlett half rose, then sat down again. Lord, but he was tired! Let that fellow take command for a bit. It would bring back a bit of his self-respect.

"I'm going on deck," said Gillian.

"No," Scarlett said sharply. "It's blowing too hard."

"I want to go," said Gillian rebelliously. "I want to talk to Ives."

"Keep away from him," Scarlett said, his face darkening.

"Why? What's happened?"

"You don't know much about him," said Scarlett. "You haven't seen him for years. And you're very young."

"I'm twenty-five," Gillian interrupted him.

"You're very young," repeated Scarlett. "Still, at twenty-five, you ought to know enough to keep away from a man when he's sore."

"Sore?"

"He nearly had us on the reef awhile ago."

She caught her breath.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Scarlett grimly, "that the fool lost his nerve. If I hadn't happened to be there we'd have been dead by now."

"How did it happen?"

"It happened the way it always does. The fellow's scared of anything that's got to be done in the dark. It's happened again and again. I suppose I was a fool not to take the wheel myself from the start. But he seemed all right."

His anger evaporated.

"It's damned queer," he said. "Do you know why it comes over him like that? Is there any way of explaining it?"

Gillian got abruptly to her feet.

"I'm going to bed," she said, and left him without another word.

She was weak with a sense of impending disaster. Her brother a coward—Scarlett's pawn; Callaghan and Torquil—waiting on the dark sea miles behind to give chase . . .

Scarlett heard the shooting of bolts as she slammed her door. The wind was increasing. He must go on deck. But he did not move, even when Ruthven sent Pau Tiau for him. Like one in a dream he sat there, staring at the wall with half shut eyes that saw only Gillian.

CHAPTER III

WHO WAS THE THIRD?

AT EIGHT o'clock on the 24th, Manisty was hanged by the neck until he was dead.

By ten the *Peregrine's* anchor was up and she was creeping across the lagoon toward the opening. The three white men aboard avoided one another. Torquil was at the wheel, Callaghan and the boys busy with the sails. And Blaise was lying face down on his bunk.

He could shut his eyes, but he could not shut out the sight of the notice on the prison door—that square of white paper in Sir Henry's crabbed writing. Nor could he shut out his thoughts of Gillian that burned him until the tears stood in his eyes. He had waited until it was almost dawn, and she had not come. When he stole back to his post just before sunrise and found the *Flying Spaniard* gone, his first emotion had been wild anger. So she had cheated him. She and those others had concocted this scheme and he was the goat. Then he thought, "I shall never see her again," and the pain of it all swept aside his anger like a handful of dust.

Perhaps she hadn't been a party to the thing. Perhaps Scarlett had sailed that night, just chancing his luck, ignorant of the fact that he was not watched. But had Scarlett ever been known to take a chance like that? White faced with misery, Blaise had gone down to Miller's and waked Torquil and Callaghan. To them he gave a series of lies that, because of his youth and his obvious unhappiness, they had accepted without question. He had been tired, he told them, and gone to sleep. When he woke up the *Flying Spaniard* had gone.

The thought of treachery never entered Torquil's head. When Callaghan let forth a spate of words, he silenced him. The thing was done. A remedy must be sought. While Manisty lived they would not leave the island. Tomorrow would come quickly enough.

It came and they slid out of harbor under a south wind. From Amanu came a breath of spices—a sweet, pungent scent that drifted to them across the quiet lagoon.

Blaise rolled out of his bunk and went on deck. Anything was better than inaction. The sick remorse of the traitor was his. The frustrated passion of the lover claimed him. Torquil—Gillian . . .

"So you've decided to turn to," said Callaghan sarcastically, as Blaise went by. "This ain't no Cook's Tour—lend a hand here! Now you boy you all same pull!"

Creaking wood and straining rope, and presently the sails bellying in the wind. The slap of the canvas was a pleasant sound in the ears of Callaghan. He hated shore life. It was good to be at sea again, after those cramping days ashore; good to be off again with Torquil and—and Blaise. That boy . . . What was the truth of the *Flying Spaniard's* escape? Callaghan knitted his bushy brows. Carelessly he went up to Torquil.

"That Blaise—" he began.

"Well?" said Torquil, without turning his dark head.

"Queer he should fall asleep on watch. He's never done that before."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, nothin'. Only it was queer."

"Hell, Callaghan," Torquil said sharply. "What are you getting at, man? Talk straight!"

"All right, then," said Callaghan angrily. "If he'd been where he ought to have been, he'd have seen the *Flying Spaniard* slip out."

"Do you mean—"

"I mean I believe he wasn't on watch at all," Callaghan said. "He was off somewhere."

"Be careful."

"I know what I'm sayin'. Did you see him come in when he waked us? Just daylight, it was. When he turned round, did you see something stickin' to his shirt, just between the shoulders? Well, I did."

"What was it?"

"A *talu* berry. You know, one of them little red berries with hooks on 'em."

"What of it?"

"Well, they ain't common. There's none near the prison wall. They grow near swamps, mostly—an' I'd say there ain't one within half a mile of the jail."

TORQUIL said nothing for a long minute. Then he shouted, so suddenly that Callaghan jumped.

"Blaise!"

"Now don't make a damn fool of yourself," Callaghan grumbled.

"Shut up. Blaise!"

"Coming!"

He came, rather white at the tone of Torquil's voice.

"Tell this straight," Torquil said ominously. "Were you on watch that night when Scarlett got away?"

"Yes."

"You didn't go away at all?"

"Go away? No."

"Are there any *talu* berries round by the jail?"

"How the hell do I know?"

"You know damn well there ain't," Callaghan growled. "But you had one stuck on your shirt when you come in an' waked me an' Torquil. Where did you get it?"

"I don't know. Maybe it was on the ground. I lay down for a bit, just to rest."

"You did, did you?"

"Yes," said Blaise defiantly. "What are you trying to plant on me? There may have been a thousand of the damned things around. I can't see in the dark. The Kanakas often pick 'em to make charms with."

"All right," Torquil said quickly. "You've given us your word, and that'll do. Callaghan, you've got to shut up. We've known Blaise long enough to know he's straight."

Callaghan turned away without a word. Watching the hunched shoulders, Torquil said:

"He's sore about Manisty. Don't mind him."

"I don't," said Blaise thickly.

He went to the taffrail and stood gazing down at the water. So Callaghan suspected him . . .

The boys were singing at their work. The canvas stood tight and hard as a drum. Under a stiff breeze the *Peregrine* swayed and swayed like a dancing woman. She was built for safety and not for speed. Without the graceful lines of the *Flying Spaniard*, she was a hard boat to handle in rough weather. Yet she could gnaw her way through a storm better than many a smarter craft. But she had her moods. Into one of these she fell now, dipping and tossing in the slight sea until the decks were wet, and Callaghan swore steadily.

Which way to head was a puzzle. They had not the slightest clue to Scarlett's position, or destination. He had many hours' start, and his boat was fast. What chance had they of running him down? To which point of the compass had he sailed? The problem loomed before them, immense, insoluble. If they went south, who could say that he might not have gone north to Saint Joseph's Island? At that very moment they might be sailing steadily in opposite ways. Torquil stared out over the seas, darkly.

"God knows where they're making for," he said. "What'll we do? Keep south?"

"We'll have to hang round a bit," said Callaghan. "Sooner or later some one will speak to him. That's our only chance."

It was a slight one. Hell, they might have to wait for weeks, thought Torquil. Perhaps it would be better to settle on some probable route and follow it. Where would the fellow be likely to go? Places floated before their eyes—Wakatea, Port Edward Island, Les Aves, Degas . . . If there was anything he wanted to sell, Scarlett would most likely make for Wakatea, where the 'Frisco boats called every month.

At midday Torquil gave over the tiller to Blaise with instructions to keep south. He and Callaghan went below and spread out a torn chart on the table. Presently Torquil lifted a hard face.

"We're up against it," he said. "He has the devil's luck—Scarlett. But I'll get him yet. If we knew what was in Moreau's box, we'd have something to go on. If we could find that out, we'd know what to look for, or to listen for, when men get talking. Because whatever it is, some one's got it—and I'll bet my shirt it's Scarlett."

"Wakatea," Callaghan rumbled, tracing with a grimy forefinger. "See here, if he went nor'east—"

"If we could get inside his mind," Torquil mused. "If we could only see what he was most afraid of, we'd get it. If he's afraid we'll get him before he has a chance to sell whatever Moreau had in his box, he'll work quick. That means somewhere near. Wakatea or Port Edward—"

"Maybe he won't sell it at all. It might be somethin' that he's known about an' wanted for a long time. Remember Davison of the *Happy Emily?* He had an image he pinched off of the Chinks. Worth a bag of gold, they said—but he wouldn't sell the damn thing. Scarlett might be that way too."

"Not he," said Torquil, folding up the chart. "Well, what about it?"

"Cruise about a bit," decided Callaghan, ruffling his great shock of hair. "We may run across some one that's seen him."

"But—"

Callaghan's temper exploded.

"What else can we do? You fool, we got nothin' to go on. You're young. You think that as long as you're chasin' about you're bound to come up with him. Where's your sense? We'll have to wait for a lead. If you was in a story book you'd be able to work it all out without stirrin' a foot. Yeah, you'd be able to figger it out, or find a message in a bloomin' bottle, or something. You idiot, there's nothin' to do but wait a bit. I'm damned if I'll chance a course until we know more . . . God, I'm hot! Here, better put the chart back— An' pass up the Scotch now you're over there."

II

FOR a day and a half they hung about, waiting for news. Of the seven ships they spoke of not one had seen anything of the *Flying Spaniard*. The slow hours crawled by, and tempers grew short. All day and all night Torquil kept a boy aloft, to watch for ships. When the evening of the second day drew near, Callaghan said:

"We'll wait another day an' then try Wakatea. I'll be bound we'd find news of him there."

Torquil nodded. Blaise said nothing. He said very little these days.

The first sharp agony had worn away to a dull ache. It was plain to him now that Gillian had used him as a means to an end. She had treated him shamefully. But try as he would he could not recover that first blind anger against her. He would work himself up into a rage, and then remember inconsequently the turn of her head, the movement of her lips when she spoke. He knew the truth, then. He knew that whatever she had done to him, he couldn't stop loving her. He remembered the skipper's wife who had beaten him . . .

The *Peregrine* was cruising aimlessly around, twelve miles south of Amanu. Earlier in the day she had sallied north to meet the copra boats coming in from Port Edward Island. They had come from the northwest, and had no news of Scarlett. Callaghan turned back sullenly. There was better chance of news to the southward. Many ships passed that way, avoiding the swirl of easterly currents that swept past Amanu.

The sun was rolling down to the sea through a cloudless sky. Across the deck the shadows grew longer. Already the sky showed a rich background for the hurrying stars. Two frigate birds were wheeling round the mast. At a shout from the lookout they sheered away, startled.

"Torikil! Him boat!"

Out of the west came a tramp, black against the sky. She was rolling lazily up to Amanu with trade goods. Torquil swung the *Peregrine* to meet her.

"That hulk!" Callaghan spat scornfully. "She must be nearly seventy years old—patched like a quilt." He cursed in disgust. "Don't break your neck goin' to meet her."

But Torquil held his course. Nearer and nearer he drew to the tramp, until he could make out Bill Hodson, the red faced skipper, leaning over the side. The sun sank, and in the swift dusk Torquil urged the *Peregrine* within speaking distance.

"Ahoy!" floated over the water.

"Ahoy!" Callaghan's bull voice roared back. "Seen the *Flying Spaniard?*"

"What?"

"*Flying Spaniard!*"

"Yes. Sou'west."

The ships were passing. Already the men's voices sounded fainter.

"When did you see her?"

"Two days—know her rig—off Paumira . . ."

"Shall I put about?" said Torquil.

Callaghan mopped his scarlet face.

"No. Lose time if we do. D'you hear what he said? Sou'west—two days ago."

"He saw her off Paumira, heading sou'west. Now where in hell would she be going from there?"

Calling Ruti to the wheel, they went below and spread out the chart. In the lamplight their faces gleamed as they bent over the soiled parchment.

"See, said Callaghan, tracing with a horny thumb. "Here's Amanu. Here's Paumira, a hundred an' twenty-seven miles due west. Now, sou'west from there. H'm. There's no place."

Torquil peered over his arm.

"Move—"

The bronzed hand shifted.

"Tungas!"

THEY stared at each other. Fools not to have thought of that before! Of course Scarlett would make for Tungas, that secret place where few white men cared to go. The sweepings of the seven seas gathered there—the dross of humanity. But the place had one charm—immunity.

It belonged to no great nation. It had no laws. Years ago it had been affiliated to the Dutch Hombergs, a group three hundred miles to the east. One day the governor of the Hombergs received a deputation consisting of two Chinese, an Arab and a Frenchman. On behalf of the inhabitants they wished to buy the island of Tungas. The Dutch government, unwilling, named a huge sum. It was paid without a murmur. Since then—

"Thieves' clearin' house!" said Callaghan. "That place! Yes, that's where he's gone. Ain't that the natural place where you would go to sell dead man's goods?"

"Ever been there?"

"Yes," said Callaghan. He lifted his great head and stared back through the years to his youth. "The first time I wasn't much more than a kid. Like Blaise, you might say. Went there with old Cap'n Polwheel to sell—never mind what. There's all sorts there—Chinks, Spanish, Irish, Malays. All sorts. Hell, I can't spin the talk, but everything's—vivid, that's the word. Color! Flamin' color like I never seen anywhere. More money an' more sin an' more beauty than any place in the world. I've been in a few, an' I know."

"How long were you there?"

"Eight days. Our boat was the *Mary Rose.* My first ship, she was. Never sailed in such a good one since." His eyes fell on the outspread chart. "Damn poor chance we've got of catchin' him if he's gone to Tungas. See the sweep we'll have to make to get there?"

They studied the chart intently. Tungas lies two hundred and ninety-seven miles west of the Dutch Hombergs. The Dutch Hombergs consist of three hundred and thirty-five islands, many of them mere sandbanks set with a couple of palms. Few of them rise more than a few feet above the level of the reef riddled sea.

"Here we are," said Callaghan, grooving the parchment with his thumb nail. "Now, look. We'll have to go south of Paumira an' then make a curve to get round them Hombergs. See where it'll take us? South—then due west. Then turn nor'west-by-west to get to Tungas."

Torquil stared at the Hombergs.

"If we could get right through—due west—instead of messing round about like that . . ."

"Are you mad! There's no way through the Hombergs."

Torquil lifted his eyes.

"You know there is."

"Take a knife," Callaghan jeered at him. "Cut your throat with it. It'll be a quicker death than tryin' to smash through by way of the Hombergs!"

"I mean it!" shouted Torquil. "It's been done. That yarn about the *Duchess*—I believe the damn thing's true. The thing can be done. It's going to be tried, anyhow."

"Not by me!" Callaghan roared. "You can break your bones and your ship on the Homberg reefs if you like, and young Blaise with you—but not me."

He was red and stubborn. But Torquil refused to be turned from his plan. Their voices filled the cabin and floated up to Blaise, who heard and wondered what was happening. The wind whipped round his body and stung his face. It was an ugly wind, coming in gusts and spiteful volleys, so that the *Peregrine* swayed uncertainly as she hurried through the black water.

THE VOICES went on, rising, falling, settling at last into a savage monotony of sound. But Callaghan was losing ground. In sullen, dogged fashion he refused to consider the idea of going through the Hombergs. Martin had lost a ship there last year. Tracy had been drowned there. All this talk of being able to get through was poppycock.

"Yeah, tell me again that if we could get through we'd be just about on time to nab the *Flying Spaniard.* Save us two or three days, would it? Sure—an' lose us our lives."

"If we don't, we'll lose him. If we get to Tungas too late, we'll never lay hold of him. Not so we can prove anything,

anyway. We've got to get him now, I tell you, now, *now!*"

"It's death," said Callaghan hoarsely.

"Let it go, then," Torquil stormed at him. "And when you cash in your checks and go where Manisty went the other morning, you can tell him you had a chance to lay hold of Scarlett—only you were yellow!"

Callaghan swayed a little as the ship lurched. His breath came quickly. He glanced at the white, inflexible face opposite, and glanced away again. Torquil was young. Danger meant nothing to him. But he, Callaghan—well, he hadn't so many years left that he could stake them all on a single throw. Yet Manisty's face rose before him as he had seen it for the last time. Again he heard Torquil's voice—

"If we get to Tungas too late—"

Suddenly he felt old.

"Reckon you're right," he said heavily. "That would be poor stuff for Manisty to hear."

"The *Duchess*," Torquil said, "how long ago was it? Thirty years? It was McCarthy, wasn't it? They say he killed a man in Paumira and got away by cutting across the Hombergs. And there were two others with him, I've heard. Couple of his cutthroat crew, I suppose. If he could do it, we can."

Callaghan did not speak. Torquil glanced at him curiously.

"You were in these parts then, weren't you? Did you know him?"

"Aye . . . Torquil, you're set on it. Very well. But we'll go the closest to hell that we're likely to hit this side of the real thing. It's a terrible passage. Those men that went in the *Duchess* with McCarthy—it sent one of 'em stark mad. An' McCarthy lives on Tungas. When the *Duchess* got there, he swore he'd never set foot on a ship again. He never has. Thirty years ago—thirty years he's been afraid of the sea, because of what it did to him up by the Homberg Islands. He'll die on Tungas."

"How do you know all this?" Torquil leaned across the narrow table. "How do you know it, Callaghan? One man mad and one living on Tungas—and what happened to the third? Eh? What—who was the third? Who was the third of those three?"

He laid one hand on Callaghan's shoulder, forcing him to look up.

"The way you talk, the things you know about the *Duchess*—is it because—"

"Yes," said Callaghan.

CHAPTER IV

THE HATERS

THE *Flying Spaniard* went hurrying southwest. She was carrying every inch of canvas that she could bear. Like a mad thing she tore through the waters, lashed on by the urgent desire of Scarlett to reach Tungas. Once there, all would be well.

Ruthven had lost his moodiness. He was himself again — vain, impetuous, boasting. The strain that Scarlett felt passed over his head. A certain cocksureness had taken possession of him. Yes, by the Lord, the old *Spaniard* had got out in front—and they would keep her there. He was oversanguine. When Scarlett remonstrated, he laughed.

"He's cruising round looking for us," he said. "Trust Torquil not to move till he feels dead sure."

"That's why you're a fool to laugh."

"You're not afraid of him, are you?"

"He's dangerous," said Scarlett shortly, and walked away from the deckhouse.

The fool, to laugh before they were well below the horizon! Who could say how much Torquil had heard or guessed? He was tenacious, that fellow. He never let go. The *Flying Spaniard* had passed several ships. True, they had been at some distance. None of them had spoken her. But there remained the possibility that she had been recognized and that Torquil might learn her whereabouts. Scarlett's face was black.

"What's up?"

It was Gillian's voice. She was sitting in the shadow of the mainsail, mending a

coat that belonged to Ruthven. The sun had kissed her neck and arms, and burnished her hair. It seemed to Scarlett that she was like a golden rose as she sat there.

"What's up?" she asked again. "You look savage."

"Thinking," said Scarlett, shortly.

"About what?"

"Torquil. If—" Scarlett's face was as hard as granite—"that outfit follows me, I'm going to kill Torquil."

Gillian's heart threatened to stop beating. She felt like crying out—but in the face of such implacable hatred, the protest could not find utterance. Killing and threat of killing—it was almost too much for her frayed nerves. She sat quiet for a moment, desolated by these terrible things that had happened—and would happen again. Then she said, almost hopelessly—

"Isn't there a shorter way—through the Hombergs?"

"There is," Scarlett said grimly. "There's a way through—but few men ever find it. The Hombergs are the most terrible group in these seas. Reefs, cross-reefs—it's like threading your way through hell. I cut across a corner of 'em once. Never again. We lost our ship, and had three days in the longboat before we were picked up. Come down in the cabin and I'll show you on the chart."

She gathered up her work and rose, disdaining his proffered hand. Her evasion made him set his lips, but he said nothing. They went down the companion and he fished out a chart whereof one corner was missing, and spread it out on a locker. She came and stood beside him.

"Here's Paumira. Here's Tungas. Between them lie the Hombergs. Here's the ship, down here, making a curve round the south of the group. Now here, due west from Paumira, is the way through the Hombergs. See? It's one chance in a thousand getting through, but—"

"But what?"

Scarlett straightened himself.

"Torquil's desperate. Who knows what he may try?"

Gillian did not raise her head. Scarlett stood there, watching her. His eyes followed the curve of her shoulders, her bent head, the nape of her neck. He felt the thick beating of his heart. Almost before he realized it, he had kissed her.

She faced him, crimson.

"Don't do that," she said levelly. "I hate it."

"But you don't hate me, Gillian."

"I never think about you if I can help it."

He went quite white.

"You don't mean that."

"Yes, I do. Don't say you're in love with me. That's a lie. I'm the only woman within miles and so you can't keep away. That's it, isn't it? You said the other day you'd never wanted a woman that you didn't get. Well, you won't get me."

"Gillian—"

"Don't try it," she advised him. "If I tell Ives, he'll kill you. You two hate each other. Heaven knows why. Perhaps it's because he knows you're the stronger."

So she had found that out about him and Ruthven, had she?

"You're angry," said Scarlett, speaking thickly. "You don't mean half you say. Well, I'm sorry. Only I couldn't help myself."

"Rubbish."

"It's not. You women can't understand. You don't know what your beauty does to us. Gillian—"

"Don't touch me!"

"You can't put me off like this. I didn't mean to rush things this way, but I couldn't help it. I'm mad for you—I want you, Gillian."

"I'd sooner die."

"Listen, Gillian. It's the truth. I love you. I want to—to marry you."

"Indéed!" said Gillian.

"Don't mock me," Scarlett warned, his face tightening.

"Oh, don't say any more to me."

She turned suddenly and ran up the companion. On the floor at his feet lay

the crumpled chart where she had flung it. Mechanically he bent and picked it up, smoothing out the creases with laborious exactness . . .

The rest of the day passed in constraint. Ruthven felt that something was wrong. At supper he looked from one to the other, a question in his eyes.

"What's up?" he finally asked, while serving canned pork. "Gillian, aren't you well?"

"Perfectly."

"Eat then, damn it!"

Gillian rose. Mounting, unreasoning rage suddenly engulfed her— Scarlett with his devouring eyes; her great lout of a brother . . . She fixed Ives Ruthven with hot eyes.

"You go to hell!" she said distinctly, and walked out.

There was no more talk at that meal. Scarlett could feel Ruthven's eyes, hard with suspicion, never leaving him . . .

II

THE *PEREGRINE* thrashed her way through an unfriendly sea to the outlying Hombergs. Callaghan spat at sight of them.

"It's the devil's own chance if we make it," he said to Blaise, as they stood watching the dim islands slide by. "But Torquil—hell, I'll put us through if it can be done."

Blaise nodded.

"He's set on tryin' this way," Callaghan rumbled on, moodily. "Blaise, you know Ruthven's sister, Gillian?"

"Yes."

"Did it ever strike you Torquil might be sweet on her?"

"He isn't."

"How do you know?" demanded Callaghan shrewdly, marking the sudden flush.

Blaise floundered.

"Because he—well, he doesn't care about women. Besides—"

"Well?"

"Nothing," said Blaise, and walked away.

Callaghan nodded. He'd guessed right then. The boy was in love. That was what gave him that strained air. Callaghan leaned back against the deck-house, cupping his hands over a match. The clouds began to rise from the black bowl of his pipe. For a long time he stood there, thinking, trying to match the pieces of a puzzle that had started to worry him in Amanu.

It was Blaise's trick at the wheel. He went to relieve Torquil, not hurrying, because in these days the sight of his friend roused in him a sick hatred of his own treachery. These Hombergs—it would be his fault if the *Peregrine* went down with every soul on board. Whose ghost would follow his own across these haunted seas? He must watch Torquil risking his life because of what he, Blaise, had done. The thought tortured him incessantly. There were new lines about his mouth. As they neared the Hombergs, he had to hold himself back from insane confession. He had a mad longing to tell Torquil what had happened, to abase himself, to bear the fierce brunt of his friend's rage. But of what use was it? Nothing would turn Torquil now. And if the *Peregrine* didn't get through, Torquil would never know. To the bitterness of death, there need not be added the bitterness of hatred.

He had almost put aside the thought of Gillian. Torquil's continual presence had banished her. The pain in the boy's heart as he listened to Torquil's calculations and plans had ousted the woman for the time being. Sometimes when he awoke he knew that he had been dreaming of her. But the stress and tear of the voyage left him little time for remembrance.

As he took over from Torquil their hands touched.

"You're jumpy," said Torquil, as Blaise started at the contact.

"I'm not."

"Yes, you are. Look here, spit it out. Are you sore with me about something?"

"No."

"Well, I can't make you out," Torquil

told him. "If you're worrying about losing Scarlett, forget it. Callaghan and I aren't harping on that. It was a damn fool thing to do, but it's over. We've accepted the consequences. You can't say that I've ridden you about it, even if Callaghan has groused a bit."

"It's not that," said Blaise. "I—it's nothing. Nothing at all."

"Yes, it is. You're queer. You moon about. You're grouchy. Hell, man, what's wrong?"

There was no answer.

"Something's changed you," persisted Torquil. "What is it? Are you in love?"

The swift color whipped Blaise's cheek. He stared straight ahead.

"Then you are. Well, who is she? I suppose she's turned you down. Some one on Amanu?"

"What the devil does it matter to you?"

"A hell of a lot. If you're in love, and it's hurting you—well, I've been there and I know what it is. Cough it up and we'll damn her together."

He was so big, so friendly. Blaise longed for the ease of confession. Confession, yes. But would it mean absolution as well? The coward in him shrank back.

"Who was it? Do I know her?"

"I'm not going to talk about it."

"Yes, you are."

He strode away and found Callaghan in the middle of a poisonous cloud.

"Will you take over for a bit?" said Torquil. "I believe I'm getting at Blaise's trouble, but he can't listen to me while he's at the wheel. The wind's tricky."

Callaghan looked at him. Then he went without a word to where Blaise drove the *Peregrine* through the restless sea.

"Give her to me," he ordered curtly. His wrinkled, mahogany colored hands gripped the wheel. "Go below. Torquil wants you."

Blaise's mouth took a rebellious curve. Was he to be ordered here and there like a kid? He thrust his hands in his pockets and leaned over the side, watching the leaping water rush past the *Peregrine*.

"Blaise," came Torquil's voice.

"Well?"

"I want you a moment."

Blaise shrugged his shoulders.

"Did you hear?" said Torquil.

He came over and swung Blaise round to face him.

"You can come below or I'll throw you there," he said, white lipped. "I'll not have you stand there like a sulky boy when I talk to you."

Without another word Blaise turned to the companion hatch. When Torquil reached the cabin, he was leaning against the table, a hard, sullen look on his face.

"Well?"

"What do you want me to say?"

"I want the truth."

"Damned pleasant always, isn't it?"

"Pleasant or no, I want it. Who's this girl?"

"What girl?"

"You've just the same as admitted you're in love. All right. You're unhappy about it. Why?"

"Don't keep asking why!"

"I've got to know," said Torquil, steadily. "You're keeping back something that would be better told. Is it something you're ashamed of?"

"Why should it be?"

"Oh, hell, don't quibble like that. See here, Blaise, I'm fifteen years older than you. I've learned a bit about women. They aren't much good, any of 'em. But at your age, they're all goddesses. Well, not all. But just one. The first one. The first time I was in love I did every damn silly thing she asked me."

"Well, what of it?"

"Just this. When a man wants a woman nothing else matters till he gets her. Even if it means, for instance, lying. Or—deserting his post."

"What are you getting at?" Blaise demanded. His eyes had a hunted look.

"This," said Torquil. "You were on guard. The *Flying Spaniard* left Amanu while you were sleeping. Now . . . "

TO BE CONTINUED

A Novelette of

The Phantom Messenger

By

HUGH PENDEXTER

UNDISMAYED by her children's three years of warring, Mother Nature, with great placidity, took up the task of arranging for the winter months by providing a glorious Autumn, a wonderful vestibule to the new year, even though one passed through it only to find sickness and heartaches. She spread the charms of the golden September with a lavish hand, as if the land were not strewn with dead; as if her children had time to look up from chaos and see a beautiful world. The seasonal embellishments of open country, hill and dale were as carefully bestowed as if Chancellorsville, Winchester and Gettysburg had not become so many battle cries.

Rippling brooks with floors of silver sand served to cool the hoofs of battery horses. The shady coppice supplied an ambush. Gracious slopes and wooded hills invited the artillery to tarry and take toll of the lowlands. Peacefully flowing rivers were carriers of death instead of commerce. Majestic mountains became so many monuments to perpetuate the memory of man's fury. The heavens were faultless, yet thunderbolts were falling and blasting. It was a ghastly game of give and take. Wild Southern yells and hoarse Northern cheers drowned the song of birds. In more secluded places, where the rumble of caissons was not heard, there was a continuing fear of what was to come, and heartbreaking anguish over prices paid.

The five men in the thicket, close by a stand of white oak, were thoroughly ob-

Civil War Days

jective in their thinking. They were at odds and concerned only about what was at hand. The youngest member of the group petulantly complained—

"This here free 'n' happy life ain't brought us nothin' yet but some rare stun bruises."

"Look a-here, Beggs. You keep your yap shet," gruffly warned a middle aged man. "It's only twenty-four hours since we dusted out. I got a good gun already, ain't I?" He held up a Spencer, seven-shot repeating rifle, and patted it proudly.

Beggs winced as he recalled the fate of the owner. He mumbled—

"But one gun ain't vittles 'n' drink for five of us."

"I'm tellin' you we'll live a fat, lazy life, with no damn Yank lead to dodge; with no damn drillin' till our hearts nigh bust. Live high 'n' drink plenty. If I hadn't let you come along you'd be back there, gittin' your everlastin' come-uppance from old Rosecrans' sojers."

"Younker's homesick for South Car-'lina," spoke up another of the quintette.

"Yah!" growled the leader. "An' what if I hadn't snucked him 'n' t'others of you out of that mess? You'd all be deaders by this time. Yanks have 'nough men to run right over us. I says to myself I'll live for the South, but I won't die for her. What's this war fetchin' us, anyway? Goin' on three years of it, an' we ain't got

whole boots. Let them who owns the niggers fight it out. We ain't got no niggers for the psalm singin' damn Yanks to set free."

"Hark!" cautioned young Beggs; and he lifted a hand and tilted his head.

All caught it—the muffled explosion of firearms along the road bordering the north side of the oaks. The leader of the deserters convulsively crawled deeper into the cover, muttering—

"Can't git nowhere but the fightin' overhauls us."

"Movin' along 'tween us an' the Trippens place," murmured another.

The muffled voice of the leader replied:

"Very place I'd picked for our doin's. Old Jedge Trippens must have lots of hard money in that big house. Fine lookin' gal, too."

"He's true blue to the South," reminded Beggs.

"To a independent band that must live off the country, he's just fat pickin's," mumbled the leader. "Once we git our hooks on the gal, we won't have to draw a knife. He'll fetch out his hard mo'ney 'n' say, 'Please, Sergeant, take this'n send back my little gal.' "

Another member of the band frowned, scratched his head and slowly said:

"I'd rather be in a tussle than to be hidin' all the time— Hark! Sounds like somethin' in the oaks!"

"Prob'ly nothin' but some wild stock runnin' loose. Mebbe hawgs rootin' for nuts. Don't hair a body up with such ways of speakin'. As for tussles, we'll have 'em—after we git more men. All the boys of our sort are livin' high in Kentucky 'n' Missouri. We'll live higher. If they'd made me a officer, 'stead of givin' all the good boots 'n' clothes to the la-da-da boys, I'd stuck through the whole derned war 'n' fought my bigess. I'm the fightenest kind of a fighter . . . Don't hear nothin' more in the oaks, do ye? Just some fool hawgs . . . I'd ask for nothin' better'n to stack up agin that ghostly sort of a critter that's had the whole army by the ears—meanin' that damn Phantom Messenger of th' onery Yanks, who—"

"You are a cowardly liar!"

The contradiction exploded at the edge of the bush growth back of the deserters. For an instant the five men were motionless, as if so many stumps. Then they scrambled to their feet, glaring wildly. A slim figure brushed back the leafy screen and stared contemptuously. His gray uniform was much worn, but evidenced a desire for a fastidious appearance. His boots were old but highly polished. With hands on his hips he met and overwhelmed the staring five pairs of eyes.

The sergeant was the first to act. He leaped to his feet, reckless as a cornered rat, and advanced toward the intruder. So quickly that none clearly saw the blow start, a bronzed fist smacked under the sergeant's chin, and the man went down as if hit by lightning. Producing a torn but snowy white handkerchief, the stranger brushed his knuckles and casually explained:

"I am Lieutenant Banner. I'll take you along and save you from a firing squad, or noose, if you prove to be worth bothering with. Some deserters run away before they know what their legs are doing."

"We ain't scared if we've got a coon dawg's show, Lieutenant," uneasily explained the youngest member, Beggs. "We heard firin'. We was waitin' in here till we could see what's up."

"The firing was nothing. A Yankee vedette chased me a bit. You admit you're deserters?"

"Well, we got sep'rated from th' Fifth Car'lina Infantry," explained Beggs.

"All right. Let it go at that. I'm picking you up as strays."

BANNER stepped back into the rough road and whistled softly. A splendid black stallion came mincing through the open growth, showing much white of eye. He made a pretense of biting his master as the latter swung into the saddle. Two

men, carrying the sergeant, came from their hiding place followed by their two companions. The sergeant groaned, sat up and stared wildly in an effort to orient himself. To him Banner said curtly:

"You're taking orders from me, now." The sergeant stared venomously at the smart figure of the stranger, who went on, "You were asleep when I gave my name. I'm Lieutenant Banner. I've taken over this squad. Look smart when I speak. Understand? Salute, damn you!"

The sergeant crawled to his feet, clicked his heels and saluted smartly.

"Fall your men in, Sergeant. Send two half a mile ahead to scout the Trippens place."

"He's a red hot Secesh," said Beggs.

"He's a true blue Southerner," corrected the lieutenant. "We're scouting his place to make sure no enemy in force is there. Sergeant, I'm waiting. What are you doing?"

"Just a-fixin' my rifle."

"*Sir*, when you answer me."

"Yas, sir. One of them new fangled Yankee Spencers. Shoots seven times quicker'n th' devil can chase a cat outer hell."

"How came you by a Yankee rifle?"

"Snagged a feller from Burnside's army, sir. He was out this way a-foragin'."

"He jumped him from behind quicker'n scat," spoke up another. "An' he slit his throat."

"It's a good gun, that Spencer. When the magazine explodes it isn't as good. A good man can fire it fourteen times in a minute while mounted, and faster when afoot. It's better than the Ballard breech loading carbine, which the Yankees thought was mighty good." As he talked, Banner patted the satin neck of his mount and sent the animal daintily dancing ahead of the squad.

He turned in the saddle just as young Beggs yelled loudly. He caught the sergeant in the act of aiming the rifle. None of the irregulars saw the long barreled Colt until it roared death at the would-be murderer. It spoke but once, and the blue spot between the scowling eyes marked the hit. Very slowly the sergeant, resting on one knee, bowed low over the Spencer until his head rested on the ground. The lieutenant blew the smoke from the barrel of his weapon and ordered:

"Bury him. Work fast."

He recharged his weapon while the four men were depositing the blanket wrapped figure in a hole left by an uprooted tree. After they had finished pawing the loose dirt and stones into a mound, Banner told young Beggs:

"I think you have some brains, youngster. Scout ahead alone. You three men keep ahead of me. Hand me that rifle."

As Beggs passed up the gun he inquired—

"Be we headin' for the Trippens place by road, if I please can ask?"

"Not if you can find a path which will take us from the road. The vedette that chased me may bob up any time. Get along with you."

"Judge Trippens' place ain't on the line of march old Burnside will take," confidently assured the youth. "But we'll take the short cut. Not more'n a cow path. I ain't been there, but the dead man drew a map in the dirt, so I know all about it."

"Don't talk so much. Get along."

The youth soon left the road and struck into a narrow path. Those of the irregulars, who hoped for a second bit of carelessness on the part of their captor, waited in vain. Each time a head turned the rider was on the alert, the Spencer rifle ready for instant use, the reins loose on the horse's arched neck.

The winding path, after finishing with the growth, led through an upland pasture. When Beggs came to a halt the little band was at the beginning of empty fields at the rear of a big house. Three men were watching the approach of the horseman and the four deserters. From the window peered a woman. Banner cantered ahead of his men, took a five-rail fence with ease and grace, doffed his soft gray hat and dismounted. Judge Trippens, white of beard and hair, bowed

stiffly, his eyes inclined to frown on the appearance of the visitor's followers. Banner gave his name and rank, and explained:

"I'm detailed, sir, on special service. I'm seeking a Yankee spy known as the Phantom Messenger. I am in hopes of finding him and reducing him to a phantom in fact as well as reputation."

The judge's manner became extremely cordial. He replied:

"You are most welcome, Lieutenant Banner. I am pleased to know your errand and I sincerely hope you are successful in running down that theatrical, sneaking spy. Make my house your headquarters so long as it suits your convenience. I believe I shall have your company for a long time. Others before you have come here on the same errand. I sometimes wonder if there is such a spy, or if this phantom isn't a myth."

"Oh, never believe that, sir," earnestly replied Banner. "He's real flesh and blood. He's been chased to the Yankee lines many times. Some of our boys think he can outwit the devil, but his escapes are just a matter of audacity, luck, and great care to always be within hard riding distance of Yankee troops. I don't believe he can outwit me if I hit his trail. With big affairs pending we rather look for him in this particular region. If I sight him I'll get him. There isn't a piece of horseflesh in Tennessee that can beat my stallion. My squad, suddenly and unexpectedly acquired, can camp back by the outbuildings."

"Your squad at first aroused my apprehensions, sir," rejoined the judge. "But if your phantom is in this neighborhood this is the first inkling I've had of the fact. I do pray you will lay him by the heels. But where quickness and speed will be necessary, I scarcely see how your followers will be of any assistance." And he eyed with displeasure the disheveled appearance of the four deserters.

"God forbid I would purposely bring such baggage! The rascals would be deserters if I hadn't picked them up."

"He kilt one of our men!" cried one of the four. "Shot the sergeant down deader'n a dawg."

The judge cast a sidelong glance at the lieutenant and said stiffly—

"I don't doubt but what it was amply justified, although a summary execution is usually an abhorrent thing."

"The fellow was trying to murder me with this repeating rifle. About to shoot me from behind . . . If I might put up here for the night—"

"But I've told you, sir," interrupted the judge, "that you are more than welcome so long as your duty permits you to stay with us. We see but little wholesome company these sad days." He then turned and introduced his companions. One of these, shaggy of hair and rough of dress and wearing four revolvers in his belt, had attracted Banner's attention from the first. The man's bearing was truculent and his eyes lowered as he stared at the rather dandified figure.

"How'd you say you come by that Yankee rifle?" he asked.

"Just as I described it to our host. Killed the man who was about to shoot me off my horse. To what command do you belong?" As he put the question, Banner drew a paper from an inside pocket and handed it to Judge Trippens.

"To my own command," was the insolent reply.

"So? From now on, my shaggy friend, you'll take orders from me."

Before the man could speak Judge Trippens exclaimed:

"Absolute authority! Over the signature of General Bragg himself! My young friend, I am doubly glad you are here."

"Thank you, sir. One must go where duty calls him. There's too many independents running about the country while the cause of the Confederacy in this end of Tennessee is in the balance."

"Well, I'll be cussed!" exploded the guerrilla. "Reckon you ain't heard of Cap'n Fogg."

"I have not."

"I'm him."

Judge Trippens obviously was uneasy.

He cast a warning glance at Banner. The latter promptly announced:

"You're demoted. You're Sergeant Fogg now. You and your kind are a part of my special service. You come to heel smartly, or you'll go to find the man who was carrying this rifle just before I shot him."

"Absolute power, Cap—Sergeant," hurriedly reminded the judge, fearing he was about to witness bloodshed.

But Fogg was craven like others of his ilk, who murdered the helpless along the frontiers between hostile forces. His demeanor changed. His eyes fell. He grinned in a sickly manner, and said—

"I want to help all I can, where I can."

"Excellent. Shell out three of those guns . . . Beggs, here's a prime gun for you, and two for your men . . . Judge Trippens, I'm sorry, but these border ruffians must be made to fight as soldiers fight. Otherwise they must be exterminated."

"Your authority appears to be unlimited in such matters, Lieutenant Banner. And General Bragg never would vest you with that authority if you were not to be trusted in exercising the same. I believe you are very wise. Shall we go in and meet my granddaughter?"

"That would be a most enjoyable pleasure. If you'll bide until I have had a word with my men— He turned to the four deserters and told them, "You will drill under Sergeant Fogg. Sergeant, give them thirty minutes of drill and ten minutes rest. Repeat until they've had an hour of actual work. Remember, a good soldier is always well drilled. You may begin now."

THE SELF-STYLED captain looked quite ferocious as he faced the men. Banner smiled faintly, as the man quickly revealed his entire ignorance of the manual, and sharply called a halt and ordered the youth to step forward.

"Beggs, you're the sergeant. See if you can make worse work of it than the late captain did. Fogg, you're a private. Take your place."

Beggs bruskly gave the order for right about face and forward march, and then halted the quartet and began snapping orders. Judge Trippens was uneasy as he slowly said—

"That Fogg is a rough appearing creature, but he kept us from being raided."

"Then he saved you from his own band. The type is more of a menace to the South than ever they will be a benefit."

The third man, who had talked none, now spoke up and insisted:

"But, sir, some of our irregulars have done good service, don't you think, Lieutenant? By cutting out wagon trains, and the like?"

"I did not catch your name, sir."

"George Lagen. Just returned from visiting the enemy."

"He's a picture taker when he visits a Yankee camp," explained Trippens. "He finds them all crazy to have their pictures taken; and he turns a goodly profit out of the tintypes, and also learns much valuable information."

"Then, Mr. Lagen, I'll be very courteous in disagreeing with you. There's no organization of irregular troops on either side that amounts to a damn. This war must be won by soldiers, not by bushwhackers."

"Well, well. I had an idea they could be useful."

"What enemy troops did you visit last?"

"The 79th Highlanders. Burnside's 23rd Corps. Burnside is hastening to Knoxville to support Rosecrans."

"Your information is rather old, but make out a detailed report and sign a copy for me. Here is my authorization. The judge already has inspected it."

"I am perfectly satisfied, sir."

Banner lifted a hand and cocked his head, but did not turn around. With a low chuckle, he said—

"That youngster will make a good drill sergeant."

All gave ear and the judge smiled as the youth continued, shrilly crying:

"Left! Left! Now you have it, damn you keep it! Left! Left . . ."

At the front entrance Judge Trippens removed his hat most gallantly and bowed low. Banner's attention was focused on a blue eyed girl, whom he instantly decided was the most beautiful of her sex he ever had seen. The judge's voice seemed to come from a great distance as he said:

"Miss Lucia, this is Lieutenant Banner, detailed for special service under the direct orders of General Bragg. Lieutenant, this is my granddaughter, Miss Lucia Trippens."

Banner bowed low over the slim hand. The girl asked—

"What is your regiment?"

"30th Virginia, when I am not detached."

"You are hunting for some one? Oh, I shouldn't have asked that!"

"Ask what you will. I will answer what I can. I hunt for the Phantom Messenger."

"And if you make him a prisoner—?"

"I shall not make him a prisoner, Miss Trippens."

Her eyes widened, her face pictured horror. Then she softly exclaimed:

"The horror of it—of this war! It seems as if the world, our world, has been fighting for years."

A colored servant, grinning with all his perfect teeth, brought the lieutenant's saddle roll from the lawn and led the way to a large chamber on the second floor, where he fussily arranged the guest's few belongings. Banner stood at the window, his face weary and haggard as he relaxed and stared at the rim of the setting sun and pondered over the tragedy of it all. The estate, he observed, was of considerable extent, but was sadly run down. Fences showed gaps. No cattle were browsing, no horses were to be seen. He remarked as much to the servant.

"Men come 'n' say dey is 'Litionists 'n' take cattle 'n' den some white trash come 'n' say dey is Secessionists 'n' take de res'."

Banner pulled the draperies a bit aside and stared sharply at a horseman who was racing up the drive and waving his hat, presumably to Miss Lucia.

"Here, boy!" softly called Banner. "Who is that man?"

The negro gave a glance, and explained:

"Dat's de Cap'n James genlmum, sah. He play kyards a lot wif Mistah Lagen 'n' win a heap of money."

"Has he a long red scar on the left side of his face?" asked Banner.

"Fo' lan' sakes! Mistah Banner, sah, yo' suttinly got eyes laik a eagle bird! He sho' git slashed mighty contentious some time er udder. He mighty glad to come here."

"Listen, boy. You speak to Captain James when no one can hear you. Say a house-guest wishes to see him at once on important business. Bring him here. Tap on the door, then open it and show him in, and go away. You understand?"

"Yes, sah. But he be so dretful tooken up wif Miss Lucia, sah, I mus' have to wait, mebbe."

Banner's expression became very grave. He ventured—

"And she is 'tooken up' with him?"

"Fo' lan' sake, no! No, sah! Mebbe some one else, yas, sah."

"Then do your errand at the first chance."

Banner passed over a Confederate fifty-dollar bill, which would not buy as much as would fifty cents in hard money, and closed the door. Then he drew the heavy hangings close over the window and seated himself in a corner, with a revolver in his lap. Little had he expected ever to see James again. The man had not bothered even to change his name . . .

Some twenty minutes elapsed, with the lengthening shadows further decreasing the light, before Banner heard the soft rap on the chamber door.

The door opened even as he was calling out for the new guest to enter. In the half light, with the profile presented, Captain James was a strikingly handsome man. It was nearly three years since Banner had seen him and he could not perceive any change in the fellow. As James advanced from the threshold the door softly closed behind him.

"Ah, there you are, sir. Had to look twice to see you. It's so cursed shadowy I can't recognize you. The nigger said an old friend wanted to see me here." The voice was soft and drawling, and the speaker, with the silky grace of a cat, advanced toward the silent Banner.

He halted abruptly, sensing that the situation was out of the ordinary. In a sharper tone he added:

"The nigger said you are a Lieutenant Banner, that you wanted to meet Captain James. I'm James; I'm here. Captains do not usually dance attendance upon lieutenants . . . Are you capable of speech?"

"Yes. Your title is borrowed, sir. In Missouri, you were a professional gambler. You were drummed out of your regiment for stealing several thousand dollars from the quartermaster-general."

For half a minute the enraged, pseudo-captain gaped at the shadowy figure in silence. Then in a hoarse whisper he cursed, and plucked a derringer of murderous bore from his waistcoat pocket.

"Softly and gently," murmured Banner. "I don't want to muss up the rug. I've had you covered from the instant you entered this room. This is what you will do, *now*. Go downstairs and tell your host that Lieutenant Banner has found it necessary to send you on a dangerous mission, and that you must start immediately. Judge Trippens will not be surprised, as he has seen my authority for telling one man to go, another to come. And don't return here unless you are sure I have departed."

"By God, sir—"

"Or I will proclaim you a thief to my host and his daughter, and tell of your court-martial by Yankee officers, and how you were drummed out."

James sagged back against the four poster bed and whispered—

"Who the devil are you?"

"Lieutenant Banner, detached for special service. You come within the scope of my work, cleaning up the frontier."

"But you covered me with a gun before you dared to speak as you did! See here, Lieutenant Banner—have you any sand in your craw?"

"I think so, but I haven't much time to bother with you."

"You'll bother with me tonight, or you'll be bothered to death by me later."

"What else?"

"Any white livered coward behind a cocked gun can talk as you have. I have a small fortune in Northern greenbacks and gold in the old house where I am staying. I'll wager it against your gun you dare not walk into the woods with me and give me a nigger's chance."

"You are a thief and a cheat. Why should a gentleman meet you?"

"Because a gentleman is not a coward. I can leave this house and waylay you the first time you stick your head out of doors. But I want the satisfaction of knowing you died, realizing the advantages were even. See here: a mile to the west is an empty manor house. You can see the roof among the trees from the window beside you. I'm going there now. I'll wait for you to come there until midnight.

"After midnight, you can not leave this house without being picked off by a bullet from my rifle. The doors of my house are off the hinges. The windows have no glass, nor sashes. There will be no moon tonight until late. Come and get my money by killing me if you be so brave!"

Banner whistled softly, then mused:

"That's an idea." And he shifted his aim one waistcoat button higher. "Why not a meeting at the deserted house in the daytime?" he asked.

James answered quickly:

"Because you'd then think I was trying to waylay you. A regiment couldn't stop you from making the old house in the darkness. Woods all the way."

"Another idea. You're frank. If I refuse you'll be back here, playing devil tricks on these fine people, after I've gone. Yes; I agree. Inside the house. Don't try to waylay me; it can't be done. Stay in the house and I'll find you before midnight."

II

THE HOUSEHOLD retired early, Banner pleading fatigue from the day's long ride. When it lacked an hour to midnight he was in the hall, and noiselessly stealing to the front of the house, thinking his enemy might be waiting to shoot him did he attempt to descend from his window on the west side. The hall window, giving to the portico, was open. With his boots slung around his neck he lowered himself over the edge and dropped with a slight thud on the soft turf. Lying on his back, he drew on his boots. He remained motionless for a few moments. He had expected a rifle shot, but the night was so dark an assassin must be close, or shoot at a sound.

Coming to his feet, his gun drawn, he bowed low and made for the nearest timber, which was in a direct line with his objective. Before reaching cover he turned to the north, a shadow hardly to be distinguished from the darkness. Instead of entering the growth he was content to follow a cow path which skirted it. In his mind he carried a picture of his enemy's hiding place.

When he believed he was abreast of the old house he cut into the growth, feeling his way and moving as stealthily as a Cherokee Indian. Now his progress was slower as he scarcely could see his hand before his face. Each step was felt out before taken. Then the timber thinned and he could see the stars, and he knew he had reached the opening in which the old mansion stood.

Originally the house had had ample grounds with stately trees for the frame. But bush and shrubs had sprung up to reclaim the opening, and the shell of what had been a pretentious home stood stark and isolated. Through the empty windows in the ell he saw a star twinkling in the west. The hoot of an owl completed the dismal solitude of what once had been the center of grace and beauty, of neighborhood merry making and good cheer. The pathos of the times often was best illustrated by such ruins of a former hospitality.

All the caution Banner had exercised in gaining the opening was as nothing with his care now in taking each step. He stalked the gaunt building as he would have reconnoitered a death trap. He underrated James none because the man had been drummed from his regiment as a thief. Nor did he doubt for a moment as to his presence in the house. His type would never rest easy so long as a man within his reach walked the earth to betray his shameful secret. Banner understood it was the blue eyed girl, with hair like corn in the silk, who attracted James to the Trippens house.

When close to the building Banner cut a small sod and shook out much of the dirt and tossed it to land on top of what was left of the broken portico. The noise the turf made was in no degree staccato, but rather soft and muffled. It was eloquent of a stealthy approach. The moment he had made the gentle cast he bowed low and moved noiselessly to the rear of the house. Without further finesse he gained a window, long since innocent of glass and sash and went over the sill with the undulating movement of a snake. For a minute he remained supine on the floor, his gun covering the back stairs. He counted twenty before his acute hearing caught a slight sound on the second floor. Apparently James was investigating the noise on the broken roof.

Feeling each inch of the way to avoid a loose board Banner gained the foot of the stairs. He smothered his impatience to be forward with the grim work and settled himself to outwait his opponent. Fifteen minutes passed, and then a creaking board advertised an incautious step taken by the challenger. Banner stared up the dark slot of the enclosed stairs. The punctilios of the duel, he realized, had no place in this encounter. He was straining his ears to catch the sound of a soft footfall, or heavy breathing, when he was disconcerted by hearing low voices outside the house. His first thought was that James had called in friends to form

an ambush. The unlikeliness of such a maneuver was almost instantly apparent. An ambush would not advertise itself by audible conversation.

"An' I say gold is hid in there," a voice was insisting. "That's why two men, years ago, fought a duel with long pistols in the upper hall." The voice was that of Fogg.

"I don't like this place," some one complained. "It's ha'nted. Queer lights have been seen here. I won't fight no ha'nt even for all the gold what ever was dug. Some say the dead men fight a duel upstairs every year, an' then go yammerin' around th' rest of th' year huntin' for what they fought an' killed each other for."

"Keep shet with such talk," hoarsely ordered Fogg, raising his voice to bolster up his craven courage.

Banner, with his knees drawn up and sitting with his back to the wall, followed the advance of the intruders with all his ears. They were coming to the rear of the house, prompted to use that needless stealth, despite the darkness of the night and their conviction no humans were near. A faint sound at the top of the flight brought Banner's head about. Then he silently complimented Captain James on his courage, as he heard the low voice softly calling—

"Are you down there?"

"Here and wait—"

A flash, a thunderous report drowned his speech, and heavy lead smashed into the wall disturbingly close to his head. He returned the fire almost instantly, reacting automatically, shooting twice; and a sharp cry and the crash of a heavy body falling down the stairs carried far beyond the house. Banner came to his feet and stepped aside æs an inanimate figure rolled through the darkness down the last steps like a bag of meal. Outside Fogg was screaming:

"They be fightin' that duel ag'in! Damn ghosts fightin' one t'other!"

The noise of a precipitate flight and the wild blundering into unseen obstacles followed; and the house of ghosts became silent as a tomb.

With storm matches Banner made a light and tore off a piece of wall paper, improvising a tiny torch. This light was sufficient to reveal what had happened. James was dead before he took the plunge, and the fall had broken his neck for good measure. Remembering the man's statement about having much money on his person, Banner quickly searched his pockets and appropriated several papers and a package of what proved to be Northern greenbacks, and a small bag of gold. Although card sharp and thief, James had made his word good. He had gone into the duel with the money on his person.

ONCE outside, Banner gained the narrow path in the open and, bending low, ran rapidly until he came to the Trippens estate. Doubly cautious now, lest some of the irregulars should discover him, he gained the rear of the house and found a pantry window open, protected only by mosquito netting. Through this frail barrier he silently went, head foremost, his body sinking gently to the floor. Pausing only to tear out pieces of the netting and toss it over the sill, he removed his boots and stole upstairs to his room. He breathed in deep relief as he softly closed the door behind him. He made no light to examine his booty.

At sunrise he was up. He concealed the paper money on his person and the gold in his blanket roll. Then he took time to investigate the several papers. There was enough, he believed, to prove that Captain James was sending information to the Confederate leaders. When he descended and entered the breakfast room, and had exchanged gracious greetings with the judge and his granddaughter, he said—

"Some time during the night I heard, or dreamed that I heard, guns fired."

"I heard two or three shots," promptly added the girl.

'Perhaps it was your Phantom Messenger you are so anxious to capture, or kill," suggested the judge.

Banner's brows drew down in a frown, and he replied:

"From what I've learned of the fellow, I doubt if he ever will be taken alive. I've never found any one who is sure he ever saw the man. He may be some one in this neighborhood. Why, sir, if you were younger, he might be you."

The judge jerked up his head, then relaxed and smiled wanly.

"You compliment me, sir. But my loyalty to the South is too strongly established. So, even if I were a young man today, I scarcely could be your ghost-man."

"So much bloodshed!" sighed the girl.

"Just as Napoleon is said to have remarked about the impossibility of making omelettes without breaking eggs."

"And war without breaking hearts," added the girl.

With a deep sigh the judge said:

"War will always bring a flood of sorrows. It is the negative of all that is good and wholesome." Tears filled his pale eyes as he continued. "Our old beautiful life has gone forever. Never in the world was such an era of neighborliness as we of the South enjoyed. What hurts us older men, who can not fight and have time to think things over, is the damnable hypocrisy of the North. The prim New Englanders made fortunes in bringing blacks from Africa. Boston papers advertised slaves for sale. But there was no money in owning blacks in that cold, bleak country. Because of the climate we are forced into this terrible struggle.

"But this is sorry talk for the table.. Just who and what is this Phantom Messenger? I've heard him talked about, but the stories are so many and different that I begin to think he is a myth. If he exist in fact, then he is just one man. He can not be in two or more places at the same time."

"He is everywhere; he is nowhere," murmured the girl.

"He is a Northern spy," said Banner. "He exists. But he has been reported to be on so many different fronts that headquarters now believes the tales are spread to bewilder us. It seems to be quite well established that wherever he is active will soon be a focal point of Yankee effort. I am convinced that he has been, is now, or shortly will be operating between Knoxville and Burnside's army. It is of the utmost importance that we hold eastern Tennessee."

They were leaving the table when a negro finished talking with a house servant, and the latter came running down the hall, his eyes wide with the importance of what he had to say. He bowed and scraped, and the judge impatiently demanded:

"Well, well, Tom! What is it? Yankees coming?"

"A sojer man says dat Cap'n James is daid in de old ha'nt house, Massa Judge."

"Captain James dead!" exclaimed the judge.

"Why, he was here but yesterday!" gasped the girl.

"I must talk with my squad," said Banner. "If the report comes from them it will be interesting to know how they happened to be there—and when."

The household gathered at the rear of the mansion, and was again startled by a young colored girl reporting that some one had entered the house during the night, gaining entrance through the pantry window. Banner paused to hear the girl's excited story, and to say:

"Hereafter I'll have the house closely guarded. But it doesn't seem possible. If a prowler entered what did he take?" Yet the torn netting seemed to establish the unlawful entry as a fact.

Hurrying to the camp of the squad, Banner questioned the men and then brought the young Sergeant Beggs to the house.

The youth made a straightforward statement of an attempt to search the deserted mansion for possible treasure, and of none of them being aware any one was living there. They had been frightened away before they could enter the building, by the sound of voices and shots. He frankly admitted the squad was terrified, and had fled back to their camp;

and that he, alone, had gone to investigate at sunrise. He had found Captain James dead at the bottom of the back stairs.

"The shots I heard in the night!" exclaimed Banner.

"What a bloody business! What a bloody world!" moaned the girl.

"By this lad's story it was a fight, not a murder," said Banner. "Captain James must have fired first, as Beggs says he was shot through the heart. Looks more like a grudge fight. I'm positive there are no Yankees within miles of us."

"And if they are near, it doesn't follow that I and mine will be abused. I shall remain here," said the judge.

"I'll scout to the north and east," said Banner. "Sergeant, you hold the squad close to this house."

"Fogg is quite a hand to want his own way," said the boy.

"I'll speak to Fogg. If he doesn't obey orders, shoot him. I'll tell him I've ordered you to do that; and that, if you fail, I surely will do it."

The lad smiled happily and retired. Lucia Trippens, her blue eyes round with horror, exclaimed—

"You'd actually kill a man who refused to do as you said?"

"If under my command, miss. Killing snakes is never an elevating pastime, but when they are rank poison one must forget the niceties of life."

"And you'll kill the Phantom Messenger because he is a spy?" she asked.

"It would be my duty, miss. Duty usually is a hardship. Every spy is condemned to die if caught."

THE GIRL'S face became pale, and with a jerky little curtsy she retired to the house. The judge took Banner's arm and led him aside, and whispered—

"You hurt her sorely."

"God forbid!"

"You couldn't understand. What you said is self-evident, but it happens to bring this spying business too near home. It's a lad, raised in this neighborhood. He's returned to spy on the enemy. She is afraid he may show up any minute—and get caught."

Banner winced, his eyes following the dejected, drooping figure of the girl. Never had he seen one of the sex whom it would be so easy to love. He said:

"We'll sincerely trust the young man will not run into danger. But death is the risk of his profession."

The judge drew a deep breath and glanced uneasily about. With a catch in his voice he said:

"I must speak plainly. I feel you may be able to help us. The boy is here—inside."

"Here! But he is not within the enemy lines. Raiders might pick him up as a prisoner of war."

"He came in the night, while you slept. About midnight. He is in the attic."

"Of course he is in uniform?"

"No."

"The young fool!" Then Banner quickly added, "To venture every risk to see your splendid grand-daughter is perfectly understandable; but to risk being caught, to be proven a soldier, not in uniform, and to be executed perhaps in her presence, is damnable."

"For God's sake don't talk like that!" whispered the judge, one hand pressing over his heart. "He never liked the work, but Captain James had much influence over him, and urged him to take the rôle. Now James is dead, it's Fogg and the irregulars we fear. Some of them would sell their souls for a purse of Yankee gold. We fear, if they see him, they'll rush him inside the Yankee lines and say they found him there."

"He must go back without venturing farther toward the enemy. I have covered that ground."

With a sigh the judge confessed:

"But the dear lad already has been inside the Yankee lines. Drove in some sheep; sold them."

"That's very bad—if he's caught. What did he discover? I'm naturally a bit jealous. It's understood at headquarters that no men shall be sent into the territory I'm covering."

"He believes Burnside is about to march; but he doesn't know the course he will take."

"That's absurd. He'll march this way, to Knoxville. He must be in a position to support Rosecrans. It's another terrible example of sending immature minds to guess at an enemy's strategy."

"Burnside will never march this way if he learns he's to be taken in the rear by Virginia troops coming up through Bull Gap. That maneuver is scarcely news to you, of course. I simply mention it to show it all depends on what the Yankees know as to where and when they will move," said the judge.

Banner paced back and forth, his head bowed. Coming to a halt, he said:

"The lad must be on his way. The house servants are to be trusted?"

"They'd die by inches before they would betray him."

"Then bring him down to my room. Feed him. I'll talk with him. My squad, while Southern by birth and inclined to favor our cause, can't be trusted beyond pistol shot, as you've said, once they smell Yankee gold. I'll go with him tonight until I know he is safe. But he mustn't try it again."

"God bless you—"

"It's a courtesy in return for your fine hospitality, sir. We shall never know all the sacrifices being made through devotion to our beliefs. Have the shades pulled down in my room, and tell the lad not to go near the windows. I'll have my squad out of the way when it gets dark."

The judge hurried indoors and Banner walked to the camp of the squad and found young Beggs enthusiastically putting his weary companions through the manual-of-arms. He was somewhat nonplused by beholding a new face. He called a halt and sternly demanded:

"Who's this new man? What's he doing here?"

"He's Moby, sir," replied Beggs. His manner suggested that the three words should be all enlightening.

"Moby? What about him?"

"Why, sir, I reckon every Southerner in this end of Tennessee knows Moby's th' slickest hossthief in th' whole State. Why, he can make the wildest nag eat out of his hand."

"Can he? Well, he's through with stealing horses for awhile. Drill him. Drill him hard! If he tries to run, shoot him! We want fighters, not thieves."

The unwilling recruit eyed Banner gloomily, and defended himself.

"I steal hosses to keep goin'. Goin' south. I didn't come to Tennessee to steal no hosses. I was sent into the Yanks' lines to find out if they knew our Virginia troops was comin' up from Blue Springs to attack 'em in the rear. They don't know nothin'."

Banner stared, and nodded, and mechanically repeated:

"Virginia troops at Blue Springs, of course. To threaten, maybe break, the Yanks' communication with Cumberland Gap. That should be easy if they can get through Bull's Gap and hold the railroad. Young man, we'll forget the stolen horses."

"I got some mighty good ones," proudly asserted the youth.

"I'm convinced of it. But you should be reporting at headquarters. If I let you go, will you make haste to tell what you know?"

"That I will! I'd never stopped here except to pick up a likely hoss."

"There are no horses here, except mine. You must trust to your luck. But you be off now. I'll try to get a man through with the same news. If he gets ahead of you, he gets all the credit."

"There ain't no man in North Ameriky who can git ahead of me, sir. I'll have a hoss, the first one I come to. I'd reckoned on takin' that black stallion, but these fellers says he's yourn."

"Be off with you! I shall report the hour you started."

Without more ado the youth dived into the growth. Turning to the squad, Banner announced:

"I want you men to go to the house where you found Captain James. Give him decent burial. Then search the

place for his papers. He had some reports he intended to turn over to me, to be sent on by me to General Bragg's headquarters. Twenty dollars in gold for the man who finds them. Gold for any other paper. All treasure you find you may keep, dividing it equally among yourselves."

As the sun was shining brightly, the men joyously made for the timber in mad haste to bury a dead man, hunt for treasure and, mayhap, find some papers which were valued in gold.

HASTENING back to the house, and observing that the curtains of his windows were drawn, Banner ran up the stairs and entered the room. With a hastily muttered apology he fell back over the threshold and closed the door on the young man embracing his sweetheart. The girl came forth, her face crimson, her eyes downcast. Banner told her:

"If you haven't said goodby, do so now. I will wait here. He must start south at once. My men are away and there is none to tell about his presence here. I will ride with him for some miles."

She nodded her head, her blue eyes swimming, and murmured—

"Please don't let him be caught by the Yankees."

Then she turned back, and with the door open kissed her lover farewell and hurried away. Banner surveyed the youth sharply. He was intelligent, obviously, and comely of feature, but sadly young for one walking in the shadow of the noose. The Trippens place was Union territory as soon as Burnside found it worthwhile to claim it and was willing to leave a few troops to hold it. Without any preamble Banner said:

"I can protect you for a certain distance. But if you love that girl don't try any more spying."

"I hate it," huskily acknowledged the youth. "Honest death isn't scareful. But such a death as a spy—I'm ready sir. I thank you. She said you were Lieutenant Banner, on special service. Don't let me take you from your work. I'll get through."

"I believe you will, but we'll run no chance of your information not getting through. While they are finding a horse for you to ride, write out the gist of your report. I will send it along with mine."

"It's brief, and soon copied, sir."

Banner ran down to the ground floor and spoke hastily to the judge. Then he saddled the stallion and allowed the girl to go and summon her lover. She was reduced to tears when she returned, and the youth was dangerously close to them himself, although he held his head high. With a wave of his hand he climbed into the saddle and Banner told him to lead the way through the seldom used paths. For ten miles the two kept together; then the youth reined in and said:

"We're inside our lines, now, sir. Lucia and I will always remember your kindness. I'll make it alone without any danger from here on."

He thrust forward his hand, and Banner shook it heartily. The youth hesitated, and then bashfully said—

"Lucia and I would be mighty well pleased if, after this killing business is over, you'd come to our wedding."

"If I can't be there, you will know you have my best wishes."

With a wave of the hand they parted, and Banner turned back by a roundabout course, taking a path that ran through some big pines. The solitude was restful, and for awhile war was far from his mind, with his thoughts persisting in dwelling on the judge's granddaughter. Soon three years of war would be behind him; only it would seem as if it had commenced ages back and would never end. As he visualized the activities on the different fronts he was almost convinced that the divided country would be at odds for many years. Campaign after campaign had been initiated, yet the same old stalemate promised to mark the conclusion of the third year.

"Three years!" Banner unconsciously exclaimed aloud. "Three centuries! Three hells!"

Another half a mile, with the growth rapidly thinning, and his pace was accelerated by the wailing cry of a woman. The pines, spaciously apart, had been marked by a cathedral quiet until that poignant outburst of grief, or fear. Banner touched the stallion's flank gently, and the mount became a black thunderbolt. Ahead the blue sky showed through the growth, like the waters of a lake seen through a lattice. The rider reined in and slipped to the ground, drawing his revolver as he neared the end of cover, and scouted cautiously to the edge of the opening, in which was a charcoal burner's camp. There was one cabin with a pathetic bit of a flowerbed by the door. A woman, whose gray hair hung in ragged wisps, stood in the clearing with her bony hands clenched high above her head, and she was groaning:

"Oh, my God! Save him! Save him!"

Banner whistled softly and the woman wheeled, her eyes blazing with sudden hope.

"You've come! I prayed you would!"

Banner glanced searchingly about and made sure there was no immediate danger. To get his own business out of the way, he asked—

"Has the paper gone through?"

She nodded, and in a low, trembling voice said:

"But brutes are coming to kill him. When he got back, followed by one of them, he was shaking with ague 'n' fever. He is in bed, helpless."

"Stop your worrying. I'm here. Who's the leader of this band?"

"Quilty— They're coming to kill him—my man!"

"Quilty, eh? A Northern border ruffian, but who serves neither side."

Then he took her hands and pressed them gently, and assured her, "They'll not harm him. You have no news?"

"Not any. He was taken sick. They vowed they'd return today."

"We don't care when they come. Let's see your husband."

He walked to the cabin and looked in on the sick man. The woman hurriedly told him: "It ain't any of the jay-hawkers, Lem. You know your friend?"

"I ain't plumb crazy yet. Glad to see you, Lieutenant Banner. I done the job, but reckon it's my last one with Quilty suspicious an' on my heels."

"I'll take care of Mr. Quilty. Open the trap to the root cellar and I'll get him down there all snug. Be making a bed of blankets while I put up my horse."

Banner walked into the growth, the stallion following at his heels and nipping at his shoulder. Coming to a shed, he put the horse inside and closed the door. Back at the house he found the woman had arranged a pallet of blankets in the excavation. Banner dropped through the opening, then reached up and gathered in the sick man as if he had been a child, and gently drew him down to his new couch.

"Now you pop down here," he told the woman. "And don't fret."

"Oh, they're coming! Coming now!" groaned the woman, as she descended to crouch beside her husband. "God help us, they're coming! One man can't stand against them!"

"I'll furnish you with a new line of thought," grimly assured Banner as he replaced the trap door. He threw himself on the floor and pulled a blanket up to his chin. Under cover of the blanket he drew his two guns, and softly called down to the old couple—

"Don't get nervous when the shooting begins."

III

WITH his face partly concealed by the blanket, Banner saw the growth disturbed by the sly approach of those on evil bent. Two men cautiously emerged into the small opening. They were border ruffians, craven when danger menaced, foully murderous when coming up on the aged and weak, never true to any cause.

The larger of the two men suspiciously darted his gaze about until satisfied that no danger threatened him. Then he swaggered toward the hut, his mate holding back as if fearing some trap. The big one

leered down at the silent, muffled figure of Banner, and called back over his shoulder:

"Th' old coot's here. I'll tickle him with a knife an' see if his howls won't fetch th' woman. You snag her when she shows up. Those who even 'pear to be agin th' North can't live in Tennessee."

"They had their warnin'," bawled the man in the background. "Give him Hail Columby an' call th' old lady in."

The would-be executioner was convinced none was there to offer even a semblance of resistance, yet he feared. He stared down on the blanketed figure and gloated, and then whirled about as if afraid that some one, by some miracle, would interfere with his pastime.

"Mercy! Mercy!" Banner whispered.

"I'll mercy ye, ye old rebel devil. A-tryin' to bust up these here United States!" To his companion he called, "Jus' goin' into this fight. Watch out for th' old woman."

As he spoke he drew a Bowie knife and, with a cruel grin twisting his heavy features, he advanced very slowly to further terrify his victim. The expression of bestial expectancy became a frozen face of horror as Banner's hand whipped a revolver into sight. There was an instant of stunned amazement, which was broken by a thin squeal of terror.

He lunged downward with the big knife and was blasted out of his worthless existence by one loud detonation.

Coming to his feet, Banner leaped over the sprawling figure, but the second man had faded from sight with the silence of a fox.

Returning to the hut, Banner threw a blanket over the dead man, raised the trap and told the frightened old couple:

"Everything's all right. Stop fretting; it's all over."

He dragged the dead man out of the cabin, to the stump of a pine; then, securing the woman's breadboard and a piece of charcoal, he printed in bold letters:

THIS MAN WAS KILLED BY LIEUTENANT BANNER, DETACHED FROM BRAGG'S HEADQUARTERS ON SPECIAL SERVICE, AFTER BEING DETECTED IN AN ATTEMPT TO MURDER A HELPLESS MAN AND WOMAN. LET ALL HIS KIND BEWARE.

The desperadoes' horses were used to gunfire, and had remained standing where they were left, their reins thrown over a low hanging branch. The second ruffian had elected to make his flight afoot . . .

Banner brought the two animals to the door of the hovel. Lowering himself once again through the trap door, he assisted the two old people through the opening. He told them:

"I am taking you to Judge Trippens' place. When you are rested and fit to travel I will give you some money and you can ride to wherever you will be safe. It is perhaps best if you ride north."

"Into the Yankee lines!" gasped the woman.

"That's the nearest place of safety for you. Just say you are refugees."

"We can't steal information from the enemy if we accept their protection," said the man.

"That game is closed," Banner returned. "You've done your part."

He brought up the two horses and assisted the man and woman into the saddles; then, securing his stallion, he led the way to the Trippens place.

It was after sundown when the little procession arrived to be greeted by the surprised judge and his granddaughter.

Banner briefly explained that the two strangers were Southern refugees, who barely had escaped from being murdered, and who would not be safe from irregular bands unless behind the lines of an army. As the Northern troops were nearest, they would go there. Judge Trippens was only too glad to take them in, but regretted they must accept protection from the enemy. The maid, after being assured of her lover's safety, turned nurse. Banner gave five hundred dollars in gold to his host and requested him to hand it over to the homeless couple after escorting them to the Federal lines.

"You who have done so much for us," murmured the girl, "also have time to help others."

"I am entitled to no credit. These people brought me news from the enemy. I couldn't abandon them to marauders . . . You go along with your grandfather when he takes them in, and you'll have all of Burnside's army surrendering to you."

She smiled, then suddenly grew grave, and said:

"You've brought down your belongings. What are you doing? Not going away?"

"Needs must, young lady. I am riding to Knoxville, with my squad of irregulars."

"But Burnside is on his way there," she warned.

"And I must be there ahead of him. He goes to replace the 23rd Corps, which is now hurrying to reenforce Rosecrans who, in turn, is trying to come to grips with our General Bragg. Even at this moment Bragg may be having it out with Rosecrans at Chickamauga."

"General Bragg will win," the girl stoutly prophesied.

"That's his purpose, his business. Now I'll say goodby, and wish you all the happiness in the world—and that means you deserve that much."

Judge Trippens came up and was much disappointed when he learned his guest was about to depart. At first he refused to accept the situation, and insisted that Banner should remain a few days longer. The lieutenant expressed his regrets and pleaded duty.

WITH the farewells completed he called out his squad and ordered the young sergeant to lead the way to the Danridge road, which ran along the south side of the Holston. To his surprise the men were in excellent spirits when told they were to travel. Truth was, they preferred the chance of battle to Beggs' strenuous drilling. Only Fogg was silent, and Banner fancied the man was sullen. There was a glint in his dark eyes which suggested some stealthy purpose. Without appearing to observe this particular member of the squad, Banner had him under close observation much of the time.

When the little band entered the rough road they met groups of fugitives, who were fleeing the scene of what they believed was about to become a battlefield. Banner questioned the more composed of the refugees, but secured no definite news of importance. Knoxville was marking time, waiting to learn if it was to be held by Confederate or Federal troops. The bulk of these hurried travelers impressed Banner as being Union in their sympathies, although none were airing their preference. Fogg also believed as did Banner, and he urged that they be despoiled.

"Your looting days are over so long as you travel with me," Banner warned.

"But lots of damn Yanks are cuttin' that caper," was the sullen reply. "They killed in cold blood a Southern hero at a charcoal burner's camp within a few miles of the judge's place."

"How could you know that?" Banner asked curiously.

"Feller passed through the south field near our camp just afore you quit the house. He'd come by the dead man. He seen him dead."

"Why didn't you tell me? You must know I want to talk with all stragglers!"

"I ain't the sergeant."

"True; ride on ahead. Sergeant, fall back here."

When Beggs was at his stirrup, Banner questioned him about the man who knew about the killing in the woods.

"He was a charcoal burner, sir. I reckoned it was some tall lyin'."

"Undoubtedly. Had his face pretty black from handling charcoal, of course."

"Thought he was a nigger till I 'lowed he was too black. Some one had lambasted him with something mighty hard at some time. Looked like th' bone had been busted in."

"I see. Which way did he go—toward Strawberry Plains?"

"No. That's the funny part of it. Popped out the woods, looked the big house over, talked a bit—"

"Out of the corner of his mouth?"

"Why, yes, sir. Fact he did. You must'a seen him."

"No. But his sly kind usually do that, my lad. He asked some questions?"

"Mighty pert with questions. Wanted to know what I belonged to. I says to Colonel Banner's regiment. Reckoned I'd make a good showin'. Then he popped back, an' that's all."

"I think not, son. It's much, but not quite all. That man's very dangerous. If you spot him again—and his face may be clean—you'll know him by the sunken place in his forehead. Bring him to me. Shoot him if he makes an unfriendly move, or refuses to come with you."

"I'll remember, sir."

"Ride forward. I believe you can hold these men together for a bit without me."

"Only one needs any watchin', sir."

"Fine. Here's a gold piece. I'll pay off the others when we reach Knoxville. Keep behind them. Shoot Fogg if he tries to bolt. I'll pick you up along the road."

Banner had reined in opposite a growth on his left. As the sergeant loped after his squad, Banner touched his heel to the black stallion's flank and streaked up the woodland path. When within a quarter of a mile of the road, he shifted his course and moved parallel to it, and after a few minutes of rapid traveling turned at right angles. This brought him to a deeply rutted road and the river. Once he had forded the latter he slipped to the ground, threw the reins over a branch and stole toward the East Tennessee & Virginia Railroad. Now he moved slowly and softly, his head cocked in listening. Then he heard it, the sound he had been expecting; the uneven click-click of a message being telegraphed.

Drawing his revolver, he heard the message as he searched for the sender. As he caught the fragment, "notorious spy," he sighted his man perched on a telegraph pole.

"Come down!" he sharply called to the man who had tapped a wire.

The explosion of a heavy caliber gun, and the violent twitching of his soft hat, caused Banner to waste no more time.

"By the name," continued the clicks as Banner fired. The man instantly replied. Banner fired a second shot. The man lurched sidewise, the locked legs and spiked ankle irons holding him to the pole for a few moments. With the last of his life he attempted to complete the message, but crashed to earth a dead man.

Banner removed his hat and stared down on the crumpled figure. It was all a part of the game, yet a cruel, hard part. He composed the limbs of the silent figure and hastily searched for papers. There was nothing by which to identify him, except the depression in the middle of the forehead.

"Poor Rankin!" eulogized Banner. "None braver, anywhere."

He had been quick to notice the grounded wire on the east side of the pole, which served to shut off all messages from that direction. He changed it to the west side, and removed the irons from the dead man's ankles and used them in climbing the pole. As he had expected, he found that the man had been using a relay box, which permitted him to send and receive. Two wires from the severed ends of the main wire entered the sides of the box. A message clicked in from the east, calling for a repeat. It was obvious that the dead man had started communicating with some eastern station and had blocked it off to communicate with the west. With the lighter wire he restored the connection of the main wire, and with the relay box hugged under an arm he rapidly descended. Coiling the ground wire he concealed it with the box at the foot of a tree, and then took to horse and raced down the road. He heard a shot ahead and spurred on until he sighted his squad. When he came up to the group he observed that Fogg's slouch hat lacked a portion of its crown. He ordered the youth to tarry while the men went on.

"You fired on Fogg?"

"Had to, sir. He was obstreplous."

"Shoot lower next time and spare the hat, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir . . . I heard some shootin' back along."

"The man with the dent in his forehead tried to get me."

"I'm glad the skunk didn't, sir."

"No, no. Not that. He was a very brave man. I respected him very highly. It was a hard thing to kill him, even though he had the first shot."

Banner was silent for a bit, vainly wishing he had come upon the telegrapher half a minute sooner. He wondered how much harm had been done his cause: and as to what might be ahead of him. Then he came to a decision, and told Beggs:

"You know I am after the Phantom Messenger, a Yankee spy. It may be I shall have to quit you in a hurry after we reach Knoxville. I'm hunting for a warm trail. If that happens, you are to take the squad back to Judge Trippens' place and hold them there until I come, or some one with authority comes. Give 'em plenty of drill. And be careful of Fogg. It's best that he dies if he persists in being a bad example to the rest of the men."

"Yes, sir. I've been thinkin' that. I'll have that in mind after givin' him one more warnin'."

"Now catch up with them."

The youth galloped up the rough road. Banner followed at a walk, his mount dancing and begging for a real run. Banner waited until the young sergeant was giving sharp orders, then shook the reins and was soon up with the squad.

Young Beggs' face was red with anger as he reported:

"That damn Fogg deserted, sir, just before I got back here. Busted into the growth. I don't know as I can trust these cusses to hunt for him."

"It was my fault, holding you back. Proceed to Knoxville and make direct for the railroad station. Wait for me if I am not ahead of you. Don't scatter and hunt for Fogg. I may pick him up. He was foolish to run away."

"The scut! He 'lows he's got somethin' to tell at headquarters that'll git him clear of solderin'."

"So? He talked to your men. Here, you—what did he say." And Banner nodded to the oldest of the group.

"Jus' some rig'role 'bout secrets, sir," mumbled the man. "Sorter 'lowed 'twould be hard money 'n' whisky for him 'n' no more drillin' if he could fetch up with some officer."

"And you let him go!"

"Never ordered to stop him. Besides, he had a big gun under his shirt. Like yours. Reckon he got it in th' old house where Cap'n James stayed. Jus' jumped us an' dived into th' growth."

"All right. Mind your manners. I may be just behind you, or ahead, or alongside. You never can tell. Don't any more of you bolt."

With this warning, Banner galloped swiftly ahead for half a mile, and then turned from the road into a woodland path. Now that he was close to Knoxville the growth tapered down to a solitary tree, and he believed it would have been difficult to have gone along on either side, or through it, without being discovered.

For half an hour he patiently waited, and was forced to admit that Fogg had slipped through, or had turned back. He rode into the road and lifted his horse into a gallop, and entered the town on the north side. A quarter of a mile east of First Creek, a part of the 79th Highlanders, hurried forward by Burnside, were pitching their camp. He knew other troops of the 23rd Corps were on their way. Crossing the railroad track, he rode for a fourth of a mile along the proposed Tennessee & Kentucky railroad.

SCARCELY abating his speed, Banner turned into a horse hovel, put his mount into a stall and unsaddled. Despite his haste and the importance of his coming, he spent twenty minutes in grooming the splendid creature. Having finished, he passed through a low door in the one-story house, and entered a room where an

old man with white hair sat at a table, poring over a crudely drawn map.

"How are you, pap?" Banner affectionately greeted, resting a hand on the old man's shoulder, and shaking his hand warmly. "Anything coming through?"

"You'll think so, son. You must 'a' seen that Burnside's Highlanders are arriving. Three of them visited me. I was scared. Mighty curious and nosey. But get along! About this time hell's to pay for some one at Chickamauga."

Banner stepped into a deep closet, hung with clothing, closed the door and pushed aside a cunningly concealed trap in the ceiling. With one effort of his arms he was up and through this and had replaced the trap inside of three seconds. The height of the opening was barely sufficient for him to lift his head while edging forward on his elbows. Removing a short section of board, his groping fingers fumbled until they were resting on a telegraph key. He waited until he heard the wheezy notes of a melodion below, then signaled a code number.

With the touch of an artist he worked the key, and at last paused and was rewarded by the desired reply. Beside the key was a pad of paper and a pencil. In almost complete darkness he scrawled code words with eager fingers. When the instrument became silent he began sending another code signal. Finally it was answered. He lay on his back to catch the last vagrant light sifting through the tiny window. When the instrument ceased its chatter, Banner extended his left hand and worked the key. This time he called for "special report." Finally his request was granted. The sounder rapidly spelled out in code:

ROSECRANS TELEGRAPHS WASHINGTON
HIS ARMY BEATEN AT CHICKAMAUGA.

Banner cut in and asked that the message be repeated. It was as first sent. He was the first man in Tennessee, outside of Washington and Chickamauga, perhaps, to know the Federal general had confessed his army had been defeated in one phase of what was to be the bloodiest battle of the entire war. He was asked to wait. The sounder kept frantically sounding the word: "Wait—wait—wait!"

He wondered if this time the Yankees were counting a coup. Then it came:

JUST CONFIRMED VA. REPORT. ARMY RUSHING BULL'S GAP DESTROY YANK COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH CUMBERLAND PASS.

Covering the instrument, Banner removed the small hatch and noiselessly lowered himself into the closest. Standing on a small trunk, he replaced the hatch overhead. The melodion continued its streaky music as he stepped from the closet and shut the door behind him. He opened the door of the living room and stepped into the arms of two Highlanders.

"I make no resistance," he sharply called out.

Other Northern soldiers entered through the cook room door and pressed behind him. One of these snatched away his revolver. A captain told the prisoner:

"You are arrested as a spy within the enemy lines. If this man is a relative of yours, you may bid him goodby. He is so aged and feeble I can not believe he has aided you in your treason."

"When a man's life is involved let us, at the least, have a decent amount of formality. Who is my accuser?"

"Captain Fogg, of the Tennessee Yankee Independents."

"Captain, hell! He's a guerrilla. He is so evil that Quantrell, out in Missouri, was jealous and drove him east."

"Probably he is an undesirable character. Both armies have to use what they can get. He acted as if he had spite against you. Your game is up, however, if we decide you are the man he says you are."

"But surely there must be witnesses to prove that the wretch speaks the truth. Where did he have a chance to spy on me?"

"He says he hid in the woods and watched your squad of rebels drilling at a Judge Trippens' place. We will send for them, both the judge and his granddaughter."

Lowering his voice, Banner said:

"Captain, nothing can be proved against me. You can hang me, or shoot me on suspicion. But if you do either, the Phantom Messenger, who has done rare work for Burnside, will go the same route."

"And you are the man who will catch him, if he be caught?"

"I insist that you take me to your commanding officer. It is very important. Take me there at once, as time is short. I am largely responsible for any plight your Phantom may be in."

The file marched him to headquarters where Colonel David Morrison was busy with his staff. The colonel impatiently suspended his work, stared coldly at the prisoner and demanded—

"How can you hope that this intrusion will help you any?"

"I only ask this. The railroad telegraph line is working. Inform General Burnside of my capture and ask him if he cares to exchange me for the Phantom Messenger. And while we are waiting, may I stay with my father? He is along in years and is foolish enough to like me. And he's as stout and loyal to the South as I am, sir."

"You will carry a sad face to your father. It's better you do not see him again for his sake. You may go; but listen. Our Captain Fogg declares you are as tricky as the devil, that you will vanish unless executed at once. Maybe that is true. But do you escape, and we won't hunt very hard. We'll hang your father. If he is a make-believe father, he will swing for playing such a game."

"He is my father. You can send me away unguarded and I will return. And, Colonel, something which will interest you: In making my compliments to General Burnside, please tell him for me that General Rosecrans has telegraphed Washington that his army has been whipped by the rebel Bragg."

"Damnation! That surely is no news to help your case. You know it is a lie!"

"My God! You'll argue about my veracity when I am trying to swap important news for my life! If I die his Phantom will fare ill. We must be brief, sir, as your time here is limited. You, shortly, will be recalled. I will write the reason with your permission."

Banner bowed over the camp table, wrote rapidly and handed the paper to the colonel. The latter rapidly scanned the bold chirography, and ordered:

"Keep this man securely guarded, Captain. If he makes a move to escape, kill him. Otherwise, he is not to be harmed."

He wrote rapidly and gave the paper to an orderly.

"Get this off at once. It has precedence over all else."

Banner saluted and turned away, instantly surrounded by a ring of bayonets, men even walking backward before him. Instead of proceeding to rejoin his father he seated himself on the ground a few rods from the colonel's tent, and composedly said—

"Captain, we have done a good day's work."

"I expect promotion for the fine piece of work *I* have done," was the grim reply.

Half an hour dragged by, and the impatient colonel sent an officer to learn if the message had gotten through. When the man returned he delivered a sealed paper to his superior. Banner's captors smiled grimly. Banner rose and brushed the dead leaves and dried grass from his person, and said to the officer—

"I'll wager sixty dollars, gold, I don't hang."

The captain was hungry to accept the wager, but shook his head. After a few moments Colonel Morrison came from his tent and ordered:

"Let the prisoner go free. He has been exchanged for our Phantom Messenger." Then to the assembled staff he added, "We are returning as we came, at once. There is need of much expedition."

IV

THE TROOPS had withdrawn from Knoxville, one brigade and the advance guard theoretically being transported by the railroad. As a matter of fact the roadbed and rolling stock were

in such deplorable condition that the soldiers were obliged to get out and push to aid the wheezy engine. Burnside's entire army was in motion. The fifty-five miles to Rogersville Junction was not reached until late afternoon, although the first troops entrained and started early in the morning. This junction, at Bull's Gap, was reached, however, in time to stop an influx of Confederate troops, the railroad passing over a low mountain and through the Gap.

From prisoners it was learned that the invaders were at Blue Springs, a few miles distant. While Colonel Morrison was holding the line at Lick Creek, until reenforcements could arrive, there was considerable excitement at the Trippens place. Banner rode up to the mansion in the morning after a night's absence, and his first words were—

"Has Fogg been here?"

"He has!" exclaimed the judge. "And with such fearsome news! Said you had been captured by the Yankees and ordered to be hanged."

"And that the Yankees are coming to burn and kill!" shrilly added the granddaughter.

Banner swept his gaze about and took note of several carts piled high with furniture. He nodded toward the vehicles.

"Just what does that mean?"

"Means we're to be burned out by the Yankees," bitterly explained the judge.

"Fogg brought that warning, of course," said Banner.

"Yes; he warned us. We have no time to waste."

"Where is he now?" The question sounded almost casual, but Banner's eyes were half closed as he spoke.

"Gone to get a guard to escort our property, what little we can save, to a place of safety."

"There is a place in the pines, a charcoal camp—" murmured the girl.

"Where is Beggs and his squad?"

"Gone to join the troops," said the judge. He shifted his feet nervously as if begrudging the delay. "When I heard you were a prisoner, perhaps dead, I realized we must leave. Three generations of us have lived here. I told young Beggs to do his duty. He was glad to make for the nearest Confederate camp. I gave him a paper, stating how he had guarded our lives and property like a true Southern gentleman. I believe my note will save him from any trouble because of the rather unceremonious manner in which he left his company."

"How many male servants have remained?"

"All I have—two." It was said sadly; and the judge added, "They don't know what this war is all about, except that it will separate them from us. And their forbears have been in the family ever since this house was built. God pity the poor things if they are turned out to depend upon themselves!"

"Send them out here and have this furniture taken back into the house. We have no time to waste."

Not understanding the reason for this reversal of his plans, yet carried along by the insistence of the young man, the judge stepped back into the long hall and called loudly. The two servants came on a run. It was obvious they were frightened. One had a butcher knife, the other carried a woodsman's ax. Banner quickly allayed their immediate fears, by saying:

"You don't need those weapons yet. Get this stuff back into the house. Put it in the side rooms."

"But you can't stand off the Yankee army," protested the judge.

"The Yanks wouldn't burn your house even if they came here. And they are not coming. They're after bigger game. I'm not worried about them. I'm thinking of Fogg. I'm sorry that young Beggs isn't here. There's a lad one can depend upon, even if he did desert."

"Why, Fogg was only a bringer of bad news," said the judge. "He can't be of much account as a friend, or an enemy. But I appreciate his warning. Now that you are here, I suspect we've been too precipitate. You should know what is to be expected from a Northern army better than we. You greatly relieve me, sir."

"I mustn't allow you to draw false conclusions, Judge. Fogg can be very dangerous once he's gotten together some of his own kind. Dangerous to unprotected folk, I mean. He knows the enemy troops are hurrying east to stop our troops from coming through Bull's Gap to smash the line of communication with Cumberland Gap. Neither North, nor South, he figures, can spare men to protect this outlying home . . . Get together all the firearms you have."

THERE was pain in Banner's face when he began removing the saddle from his mount. The big stallion repeatedly pretended to bite him, and nuzzled his nose impatiently under his arm.

"You must go," murmured Banner in a husky whisper to the horse. "You didn't bring on this damned war. You must run for it. And don't let the poisonous skunks catch you." He glanced behind him. Both the judge and his granddaughter were in the house, busily collecting guns of various kinds. He held out his hand, and the stallion lifted his leg. It was their way of saying goodby. Banner threw his arms around the powerful black neck and whispered, "Don't be caught. Don't get killed, old fellow." Then he stepped back and slapped the silken flank and sharply cried, "Go!"

With a whinny of protest the big black galloped off and disappeared in the growth north of the house.

As Banner passed through the front door the girl emerged from the reception room and seized his arm; tearfully she whispered:

"I saw it. You two were bidding each other goodby. I know what that means. I know how you feel. You believe we all are in a very desperate condition."

"No, not necessarily, Miss Lucia. I sent my horse off as the vermin would kill him. But they won't get inside to harm us. You lie flat on the floor in some room upstairs."

"You talk as if you were sure that Fogg and others like him will come."

"They will come," Banner gravely replied. "An aged man and a defenseless girl—against such they will be very brave. I always shall regret that I didn't shoot the beast . . . Well, well. This isn't business. I can get up on the roof?"

"Up the ladder and through the hatchway. You'll be between the two chimneys. There's a dozen square feet of flat roof."

"Good! Now bring some powder and bullets."

The latter were in a basket and of various sizes. Among the guns he found two Deckard rifles, which had been used in the Kentucky country when white men went there through Cumberland Gap at the risk of losing their hair. They were deadly, precise weapons. Banner found a handful of small bullets which would fit their small bore, and loaded the two. There were several shotguns, which he said must be reserved for close range. He placed one in each of the two rooms off the front hall, and two more at the back entrance.

The next piece to take his attention was an ancient arm of the blunderbuss style. This he loaded and left on a table by the back entrance, and warned the girl not to use it. For her he carefully loaded a derringer. She understood, and whispered—

"That is for me."

"Put on your house apron with the pocket. Carry it in that. We'll believe you'll not need to use it, but you must not be captured—alive."

"I'll open the last door with that, the last thing."

"Have you any half barrels, or kegs down cellar?"

"Some. I don't know how many. Some are filled with old wine. Others with rum and whisky."

Banner hurried below to investigate, and quickly rolled to the foot of the stairs several kegs and half barrels containing ancient vintages and strong liquor. Mounting the stairs in a pair of bounds he ordered the servants to bring them up, and to leave three at the rear of

the upper and lower halls. Leaving the girl to see that this was done he ascended to the roof and swept his gaze over the surrounding country. In the south a faint smudge of smoke rose lazily above the trees.

"Their breakfast smoke," he murmured. "Fire's most out."

He left a rifle there and hastened below, to find the judge loading three revolvers, two long dueling pistols and several smaller pistols. The judge grimly informed him—

"Lucia has double charged the shotguns."

"A girl in a million . . . Seems to be our time of waiting. I'll return to the roof again."

Banner was off, taking the stairs in long jumps. From his high coign of vantage he stood erect between the two chimneys and studied the growth. He believed he glimpsed the satin flanks of the stallion in the timber north of the house. Now he almost wished he had risked sending the girl on the horse after Burnside's army, although he realized the country was swarming with guerrilla bands.

Spang!

The lead flattened against the chimney behind him. He dropped to a sitting posture and endeavored to locate the source of the bullet from the angle of its impact. He could discover none of the bushwhackers. Hastily descending to the ground floor he announced—

"They've arrived!"

"I heard the shot," quietly said the judge.

The girl, with a little cry, flung herself to one side of the window, but the bullet had cut a round hole in the glass before she had moved.

"Don't you dare get in front of a window again!" cried Banner. "They'll shoot at you as quickly as they will at me. Only they don't know I'm here."

"Then why does that beast of a Fogg suspect we've changed our mind about having him escort us to some place?" she whispered.

"He would have come openly if he hadn't noticed there was no furniture outdoors. That told him you suspected and feared him."

Racing to the second floor, Banner entered the room he had occupied as a guest. Standing back from the window nearly the width of the room he scanned the growth, his rifle ready. There was a movement in the bush, then a man stepped into view, his gun half raised, his eyes raking the building in search of a victim. Banner fired and, with a yell of pain, the fellow dropped, shot through the hip. Unseen hands dragged him to cover. The girl screamed up the stairway—

"They'll burn us out!"

Banner rushed into the hall and down the stairs, leaping the last half of the flight. The judge was in the act of discharging a heavy duck gun. The unwieldy weapon knocked him against the wall and all but broke his shoulder. He sank to the floor, groaning with pain.

"Get him upstairs!" Banner shouted to the girl, as he stepped to the side of a window and spied at an oblique angle.

THE GIRL'S alarm was well founded. A cart loaded with blazing hay and dry wood was being pushed forward. The assailants crouched low and close to the cart, thoroughly protected. Leaping into the hall and frantically shoving pieces of furniture aside, Banner jumped down the steps and threw himself flat, opening fire on the three pair of legs, all that was visible of the raiders. He sent a double charge of buckshot into the mass and was back through the doorway before any of the besiegers could fire upon him. Two of the men, apparently seriously hurt, commenced crawling toward the growth. Banner raised his revolver, but the judge caused him to hold his fire.

"Save your lead! They're crippled and out of the fighting."

Banner lowered the weapon and regretted the act when the two, close to cover, suddenly came to their feet and fairly hurled themselves into the growth.

The third man, half under the blazing cart, was unable to move. He was shrieking horribly. It was obvious that the flames would finish what the bullet began. He threw himself sidewise, and his head came into view.

"It's horrible how he must die!" gasped the girl.

"Let him roast!" snarled Banner, his eyes now those of a madman. "He'll find it much hotter in hell."

As he ran up the stairs he could hear the terrible screams of the wretch. From the window at the front end of the hall, he saw the bottom of the cart burn through sufficiently to permit some of the embers to fall on the trapped raider. Banner brought down his gun and fired, giving the wretch his *coup-de-grace.* It was a far greater mercy than would be extended to any in the house did the besiegers effect an entrance.

A servant yelled that men were at the back entrance. Running along the hall, Banner saw the door buckle under the impact of a log, serving as a battering-ram. This entrance was three steps below the level of the hall. Banner sent a half barrel of Madeira bouncing down the stairs and followed it with another. The door gave way just as the first arrived and the foremost man was knocked off his feet. The second rolled harmlessly against the wall. Banner rapidly emptied his gun and cleared the doorway.

He partly closed the damaged door and stood the half barrel against it, then called on the servants to form a barricade with the furniture. Then, chased by haphazard bullets, he jumped the three steps and returned to the front of the house. Panting heavily, he told the judge:

"I made—unpardonable mistake in not sending—Miss Lucia away—on my horse. I'll try it now."

"We're surrounded!" protested the judge.

"We may be. But, by the eternal, we're not whipped yet!" raged Banner.

The girl seized his arm to secure his attention, and whispered—

"Do you honestly believe we stand any chance?"

"Certainly, Miss Lucia." Banner averted his head so that she might not read the misery in his face. "There are more than I had expected," he went on. "I reckoned on Fogg and four or five others, and no more."

"If they wait until darkness sets in they can fire the house," said the girl.

"What a fool not to think of it!" cried Banner. "Boy, gather all those flowers and take them to the roof. You other boy, carry a bucket of water."

From the fireplace Banner gathered an armful of dry kindlings, dragged a cover from a sofa and hastened after the terrified servants.

They had finished their errand and were swarming down the ladder as he arrived.

"Pile the furniture against the doors and windows," he told them. "Then bring me more water. Don't forget. More water!"

He wet down a portion of the flat space, and with paper and splinters of pine he started a blaze. At the risk of burning the house he fed more dry wood to the flames and placed the moist flowers and fragments of cloth on the fire. As the yellow smoke began to roll upward he risked bullets by standing erect and cutting the sofa covering in half. Dropping one piece he used the other to control the smoke. He sent it in balls and long streamers, hoping to convey an intelligent message in the telegraphic code of dots and dashes.

"Come—help—come—help . . ."

He repeated the message until forced to desist and fight the fire, which now was eating down through the roof. The blaze extinguished, Banner descended, and found the judge spasmodically firing into the growth, while his granddaughter reloaded the weapons. He drove the two up the stairs and told them to remain in the hall. By this time, although none of the raiders showed himself, every window and door was being assailed by lead. From the rapid fire Banner knew that a

portion, at least, of Fogg's force was armed with Spencers, or breech loading rifles.

He ran upstairs and crawled on the floor into his former sleeping room, and secured a mirror from the wall. Then, pushing the chair ahead of him, he crawled toward the window. Reaching forward he placed the mirror in the chair and, from a position close to the wall, he secured a view of a short section of the growth. For half a minute Banner indulged in this unique mode of spying, and then a ball shattered the mirror. But he had seen enough to make him fear the girl would have use for the pistol in her apron pocket.

Returning on his hands and knees to the hall, he frankly reported:

"They are thick on that side of the house. Many more than I believe would come. I am a criminal—a murderer, for not risking a ride north for the three of us."

"It's wicked for you to blame yourself like that," passionately cried the girl. "This place has been watched ever since they told us we must leave. We would have run into an ambush if we'd tried flight. Fogg did not dare trouble us when he first came. He wanted more men, being a coward. He sent for more men, his own kind, and they came."

"I have failed," Banner quietly said. "We'll make our last stand at the head of the stairs. They will take no prisoners." He called to the servants, who promptly appeared from a linen closet, and directed them to pile furniture at both ends of the hall. He then said to the judge:

"When we see we can't hold them off here, we go higher. To the roof, if necessary."

"I'll burn in my old home before giving them the satisfaction of killing me," roared the judge.

"Here they come in a mass!" cried Banner. "Stay here—you two!"

Outside rose loud cheers, howls and execrations. The different timbre of the confused outcries puzzled Banner even while he was accepting the situation as being hopeless. He ran to a front room and was astounded at beholding heavily bewhiskered men, dressed like tatterdemalions, streaming across the grounds. He also discovered that, despite the gunfire, no lead was entering the house. Then his gaze rested on Captain Fogg. At that moment he was violently pushed aside by Judge Trippens, who shattered the window glass with a kick of his booted foot.

"Fogg! Fogg! Turn this way!"

THE PIERCING treble penetrated the heavy din—even pierced the understanding of the craven, who mechanically turned his head without lessening his stride. The judge was armed with an old Kentucky rifle, such as Daniel Boone might have carried. He threw up the gun and drew a bead. Fogg continued running, with his head twisted about, his glaring eyes fixed on the aged man. With the thin crack of the long rifle the judge became an executioner, and the small bullet in ending the career of the reprobate caused the latter, dead on his feet, to turn a grotesque somersault.

Powerless to move until this piece of tragedy had been played out, Banner vaulted down the front stairs and hurled the furniture aside. Throwing open the door, he whistled shrilly. The black stallion crashed from the growth and raced to his master, who leaped into the saddle. The big black reared and pivoted. As the hoofs came to the ground Banner was dumfounded by the appearance of his late sergeant Beggs.

The youth was grinning wolfishly, leading from cover some score of roughly dressed men. The newcomers were ruthlessly hunting and exterminating Fogg's irregulars. There was no time for words, even if speech could be understood. The stallion forged ahead to get where the smoke was the thickest. Young Beggs raced at his side, clutching a stirrup strap. The rattling crescendos of volley firing diminished to an irregular, rippling series

of explosions. No prisoners were taken. Those who survived did so by flight.

When the last shot had been fired, Banner dismounted and embraced the youth.

"How did you happen to come? Another five minutes, and we'd been finished."

"Saw the smoke. Looked funny for chimney smoke. It come in puffs, with lean streaks between. Knew it must be about in this neighborhood . . . So it was Fogg who was up to the mischief! I always opined I done wrong not to have give him his needin's a-long 'fore this." Then, with much pride, Beggs explained, "These are my men. Reg'lar hellions to fight!"

One of the men respectfully called out—

"You-uns in th' big house all right?"

"Thanks to you boys, yes. Wait a minute."

Banner ran into the house and met the judge and his granddaughter coming out. Both were weeping from happiness and weakness. Banner secured his blanket roll and opened it on the floor of the hall, taking out his store of gold. Returning to the score of Confederates he handed the money to young Beggs, and said—

"You will divide this as you see fit."

"Jee-rusalem!"

"You've been a good friend to me this day, and to these splendid people. We're still in your debt."

"Well, sir, it's always even-stephen for this outfit," gasped Beggs. "Three of you boys count it and divide it in equal shares."

"Three cheers for—" enthusiastically cried a man, but did not finish.

All stared nonplussed at the Federal cavalry sweeping into the open from all sides. Before Beggs could give an order, Banner was shouting:

"Don't fire a shot! Ground arms! I'll fix it for you!"

But it was Beggs' quick repetition of the command that brought obedience. Springing on to his horse, Banner raised both hands above his head and galloped to meet the commander of the troop.

"What's all this mean?" savagely demanded the captain. "Caught looting! We'll waste no time with such scum."

"You must have received my smoke signal, Captain. Made from the roof of that house. These Confederates arrived ahead of you and routed, or killed, a large band of guerrillas, who all but had Judge Trippens, his granddaughter, and myself at their mercy. I believe I rank you." He handed over a paper.

The captain snatched it from his hand and read it carefully, his brows puckered in amazament. Aloud, but addressing no one in particular, he said—

"Lieutenant-Colonel Banner . . ."

"Colonel Morrison, of the 79th Highlanders, gave me this one—to be used when it was inconvenient for me to reveal my true standing. It gives me more authority, in some ways, than does my commission."

The captain gaped in amazement as he read the second paper.

"I'm very familiar with Colonel Morrison's hand of write," he mumbled. Then, under his breath, "Good Lord! You're our Phantom Messenger!"

"I am. I have been hunting myself in the guise of one of Bragg's officers. I feared the movement of troops to Bull's Gap would leave my smoke message unnoticed. But this lad here saw it and responded just in time . . . Now we will pay our respects to Judge Trippens and his lovely granddaughter. They are Southern in sympathy, but mighty fine people from every angle. I fear he will be disappointed in me."

The two were met at the doorway by the judge and the girl. The former stiffly remarked:

"Fate arranges that I should be indebted to the enemy. I am many times indebted for the rescue of my granddaughter."

Banner was deeply embarrassed. Drawing a deep breath, he baldly announced: "Now that it's all over, Judge Trippens, I must confess I have been doing secret service work for General Rosecrans. I am Lieutenant-Colonel Banner. It was

necessary for me to come here. Your home was reported at headquarters to be the rendezvous for spies. We knew Captain James often called here. And I had his history. I tried not to abuse the hospitality you so kindly extended to me. I gave you a clean bill to my superiors. And, perhaps, I have worked in other ways to offset the deceptions it was necessary for me to practise."

The girl whispered to her grandparent. The frozen expression of the old face melted away. Banner knew the girl had reminded the judge of her lover, and how the newly discovered Yankee had saved his life. Swallowing convulsively and regaining partial control of his voice, the judge said:

"Regardless whether you be for North or South, sir, you have placed me under lasting obligations. But there is one thing which I can not understand. How did you trick General Bragg into giving you the indorsement, which you showed me? I relied on it thoroughly, being well acquainted with the general and very familiar with his handwriting."

Smothering a smile by an effort Banner explained:

"I wrote that document and signed Bragg's name, sir. I wanted to have it right—for me."

"You are many things to many men," said the girl, now standing in awe of the late guest.

"I've tried to be decent in my deceptions, Miss Lucia. I had to run great risks and jeopardize my life many times. But you will never know, Miss Lucia, the worst hurt I have received since being detached for special service."

But the girl did know, and she flushed vividly, and impulsively gave him her two hands.

Spinning about, Banner said—

"I will now dispose of my rebel friends."

"I have given orders for them to be disarmed and to be marched to our lines," announced the captain.

"Countermand your orders, Captain," advised Banner in a low voice. "It will come better from you than from me. After a man, or men, have saved my life, I do not repay by making such prisoners . . . Sergeant Beggs, step forward. You will take your men where you will. I advise you to join regular troops. The rank I gave you seems to stick. I'm wishing you a lieutenancy; then, a captaincy, and as much higher as you are qualified to advance."

As he finished, Banner thrust forth a hand and warmly shook the brown one of the young deserter he had made a sergeant.

"You're good," surrendered the captain. "When a man in Federal service can name a sergeant for the rebel army, he's good. When do you become the Phantom Messenger again?"

"Not that rôle again. I can't repeat. Having found myself, I'm riding back to overtake the army with you."

They jangled away at the head of the column, the black stallion mincing and waltzing, and occasionally endeavoring to nip her master's boot. Behind them tarried Sergeant Beggs and his men, busily engaged in ridding the premises of those who had fallen in the attack on the big house; and as they worked each man could hear the chink of Yankee gold in his pocket.

And the Phantom Messenger would ride no more.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A FEW words from Harold Lamb, in connection with his narrative, "Beauséant Goes Forward," in this issue:

Piedmont, Cal.

The Battle of Gaza in 1244 was one of those little known affairs that shaped destinies. The pages of history have little to say about it because we have almost no authentic reports as to what happened and why. Nearly all the Crusaders were killed. Like the Custer fight, it has come down to us as a name and a date and a casualty list. We will probably never know just what happened there.

The Moslem chroniclers, however, have shed some light on the campaign, and we have learned some details from them. Such details are given in this article.

The battle itself changed the whole course of the Crusades. It marked the final loss of Jerusalem—until Allenby walked into the city with his army in one of the last campaigns of 1918. It marked also a new force on the Moslem side, the arrival of contingents from Central Asia, driven west by the hard fighting Mongols, who had first appeared under the horned standard of Genghis Khan.

BEFORE Gaza the Crusaders on the coast and the cultured Arab sultans, the descendants of Saladin, managed to live and let live, and probably Jerusalem would have been recovered in time by the Christians. But the incoming of the new fighters from mid-Asia, who increased in numbers as the years went by, brought the conflict to a head again,

and gradually turned the scales against the Crusaders.

From that time the tolerant Arabs were pushed out of power by the masses of Turks and Tartars, who gathered together in Cairo, and presently founded the Mamluk dynasty that endured until Napoleon entered Egypt.

For another thing, Gaza saw the rise to fame of that redoubtable fighter, the Panther, who was destined to do what Saladin had not been able to do. And the battle brought about the great Crusade of Saint Louis, the last general Crusade to reach the East. —HAROLD LAMB

THE exception taken by a reader in the following letter introduces a subject constantly in dispute: the real names of some notorious Western characters as differentiated from their various and unstable aliases.

Denver, Colorado

In the December 15th issue Raymond S. Spears has an article "Whence Came the West." In it I noticed he used the name of Harvey Logan, alias "Kid Curry." This is wrong, for Harvey Logan was one man and Kid Curry was another. I knew them both and have played many a friendly game of cards with Kid Curry.

This is not sent in by way of carping criticism but merely as a correction. —LESLIE DAVIDSON

Mr. Spears' reply:

Inglewood, Cal.

Many thanks for your correction of my remark about Harvey Logan, alias Kid Curry. Yet Logan used the name with a lot of others, and the Pinkerton reward notices back in 1900 read "Harvey Logan, alias Kid Curry;" and when Logan was caught in Knoxville, Tenn., just as I came down the Holston River, a newspaper, the *Sentinel*, said, "There is little doubt in the minds of the officers and detectives that they have in the Knox county jail the leader of this famous band (Hole-in-the-Wall), Harvey Logan, whose real name is believed to be Kid Curry." In the address by William A. Pinkerton, before the International Association of Chiefs of Police at Jamestown, Va., in 1907, he names (p. 72 of Train Robberies booklet) "Lonny Logan and Harvey Logan, alias 'Curry brothers'" and on p. 74. "About 1900, after these robberies, under the leadership of Harvey Logan, alias 'Kid Curry' . . ."

Charlie Siringo, the famous cowboy detective, told me of following Logan and others of the Wild Bunch. And on p. 328 of his "A Cowboy Detective" he says, "I learned that outlaw Harvey Logan, alias Kid Curry . . . etc."

I wish you'd write me your account of both Harvey Logan and Kid Curry. You see, Logan (whose brother Lonny was killed near Kansas City) used names of people he knew. In South America, for example, he was Ryan, (or perhaps his partner, Butch Cassidy was Ryan) and it just happens for about two months, I've been trying to straighten out these aliases and the Wild Bunch and such matters. I went to Utah in November and looked into Butch Cassidy's boyhood, among other things.

You played with the man from whom Logan took his alias when he was long riding.

I met Bob Lee, also Bob Curry under another name, a few years back. Bill Cruzan had a restaurant where if a man didn't have 15c he could get a meal—three pints of beef stew and a dry loaf of bread—for a canceled two-cent postage stamp. That wasn't his name, there, but when I asked him how come? (though it was none of my business, as I told him) he said to me, "My boy, I've been hungry!" He and the others thought I was a Pinkerton—as I realized five years later when I learned who they were. But I was a painfully innocent magazine writer.

These boys were terrible outlaws. They rode from Milk River to Chubut in the Argentine. Harvey Logan is said right now to have been pensioned, which was cheaper than trying to catch him. And the reason he and Butch Cassidy and some of their mates were so effective was because they had dirty deals as boys from men who used political power to thwart justice. And my inquiries have brought answers that indicate wrongs done boys led to practically every great outlaw band in the West.

Thus *Adventure* printed Emmett Dalton's story a while back. In Indian Territory, and afterward in Oklahoma, it is a familiar tradition how honest law officers were cheated out of rewards, mileage, wages. Burt Alvord's criminal career began when he was cheated out of a big reward. This is a phase of high importance in examining these strange, wild careers. —RAYMOND S. SPEARS

A NOTE on huskies, by A. deHerries Smith, who wrote "North Bounty" in this issue.

Edmonton,
Alberta, Canada

As you know, the genuine husky is generally half or three parts wolf. Some of them are entirely wolf, as the trappers get them out of the dens when they are pups, train them and run them in teams. I know several men who drive such teams of wolves, but with a husky in the lead. The reason for this is that the wolf is so damn curious that he'll keep eternally turning off the trail to investigate anything strange.

As well, when the Indians want to breed their huskies and improve the strain they tie a lady husky out in the woods. Visits from gentlemen wolves result. And a three-quarters wolf dog, bred to a wolf, produces a wolf.

On the other hand, many of the dogs in the North that go by the name of husky are nothing of the

kind; just a bunch of unfortunate mongrels. The Indian is not particular. He'll hitch up anything that is able to crawl. As for the police, they drive huskies and so do the majority of the traders and trappers. —A. DE HERRIES SMITH

A READER who served with a tank battalion tells of an amusing incident when numbers got mixed:

Barrington, Illinois

In Ask Adventure of the January 1, 1931 number there is a query about the Tank Corps from W. H. Fraze. I can not enlarge on Capt. Townsend's answer, but I served as a sergeant in Co. A, 335th Battalion T. C., A.E.F. and can not help adding a word. He says that the 1st Tank Center and the 1st Heavy Tank Battalion were *reorganized (in France) as the 326th battalion* and the 41st battalion and then (later on) as the 344th and 301st battalions.

It also happened, evidently through a mistake, that a 326th and a 327th battalion was organized in the summer of 1918 in this country at Camp Colt, Gettysburg, but apparently the duplication was not discovered. I served for a few weeks as a private in Headquarters Co. of the 327th at Gettysburg before I was transferred to the 335th. About three weeks before we left for France in Sept. 1918, the local 326th and 327th left for range practise at Tobyhanna, Pa., but we all thought they had sailed for the fighting. My outfit got under way on the *Leviathan* around the first of October and, after landing in Liverpool, were soon across the channel and in a British rest camp at Tour-la-ville, outside of Cherbourg, waiting for the freight cars to take us east.

THE first day there, an Irishman in our outfit named Flannery came back to the tent as white as a sheet. He said he had run into an American Tank Corps man in a wheel chair with one leg in a plaster cast, one arm in a sling and his face and head all bandaged up. He said, "Hello, soldier, what outfit?" The wounded man replied, "The 326th Tank Battalion." Flannery, rushing back to us allowed as how we had certainly picked a hell of an outfit for action. Here was a guy who had left Gettysburg three weeks before we had and now he was recuperating from his wounds well enough to be out in a wheel chair! It took us a good while to find out that the wounded man didn't belong to the same 326th Battalion we had known at Camp Colt and we were a whole lot braver bunch of soldiers when we did find out.

The pity of it was that the desk soldiers later left the old number to the battalion who hadn't been in action and they changed the real 326th to a number that hadn't any glory in it, making it the 344th, I think. Well, the war was run like that in lots of different departments. —RUSSELL S. WALCOTT

THE man on the cover will, I know, have some of you guessing. Mr. Gerard C. Delano, already well known to *Adventure* readers for his splendid studies of the American Indian (the December 15th cover, for example) conceived the idea for this design as appropriate for an issue featuring a Harold Lamb narrative of the Crusades. It required quite a bit of research, but I'm sure you'll all agree it was worth the effort. Here's a brief note from the artist:

New York City

The figure represents a Mongol type engaged against the Crusaders.

The design of the general costume—headdress, shield, scimitar and stirrups—is based on the pen and ink illustrations of the Saracens by M. M. Williams in "The Story of the Crusades" by E. M. Wilmot-Buxton.

The horse's bridle, breaststrap (or martingale) and saddle were designed from a combination of impressions gained from a 1186 to 1334 Japanese print at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, line cuts in several books on early Persia and Assyria; and exhibits of ancient Japanese origin on view at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

The man's shin guards are largely imaginative, but their design is based on the shin guards worn by the Japanese of the approximate period of the Crusades as shown by prints and exhibits at the above mentioned museums. —GERARD C. DELANO.

ROBERT SIMPSON, who wrote "The Left Hand of Bendi," in this issue, expounds his theory of the psychology of West African cults. It is said of us Americans that we're as cult ridden as any people, of any time; that there's no fad, no shibboleth too preposterous for us to subscribe to and support with ardor. True or false, it might be interesting to expose a few of our more sensational ones to Comrade Simpson's test and see whether basically they haven't more than a little in common with those of the African savage.

New York City

Government by fear is no stranger to almost any state of human society, and fear is, by and large, one of the most productive and by no means the least constructive of all human emotions. For while necessity may be the mother of invention, I suspect fear is its grandmother, and nowhere on earth is this better exemplified than in the torrid and fever haunted West Coast of Africa.

In the seamy, mud and wattle villages along this coast which has so aptly been given the significant name of the White Man's Grave, the daily life of even the most inconsequent paddle-boy is at the mercy of an invisible ogre that was born of fear, suckled upon hate and superstition and which then grew to Gargantuan proportions by the simple process of making itself more feared than the bugaboo that had given it birth.

THIS ogre is the secret society. Originally, the secret society as an idea was a protective measure against the machinations of witch-doctors and workers of black magic, and the Egbo or Leopard Club of the Efik people is believed to have been the first of these secret societies to come into existence on the West Coast of Africa.

Whether this claim is justified and whether this Efik "Leopard" society has any connection with the famous Leopard society of Sierra Leone, is debatable. In any event it is fairly well established that the secret society idea has been a vitally important part of West African life for a longer time than any one has been able to trace from any records that are available. In fact, so important has the secret society proved from time to time that it has paralyzed trade and compelled government to mark time until the objects of the particular society in action were satisfied.

IN A single district it is not uncommon for numerous cults of one sort and another to flourish at the same time. Sometimes they flourish in harmony and sometimes they do not; in which latter case the commissioner of the district is likely to find himself wondering, every now and then, why the wheels of government seem to have stopped revolving and what the sudden and mysterious epidemic of murders is all about.

Every native is a member of at least one secret society; many are members of several and, as usual, the wealthier the member, the more safety and protection he can reasonably expect to enjoy.

EACH secret society has, of course, its own ritual, its own sacred and inviolate paraphernalia, its properly appointed officers and its carefully graduated degrees of membership. In the case of the Egbo Club, this graduation is a most elaborate business; and that these secret societies really are secret societies there is no doubt whatever. Not only is their ritual a most profound secret, but their meeting places also are rigorously guarded against intrusion. In one instance that has possibly become a local classic, the daughter of one of the highest officers in the Egbo Club accidentally stumbled upon an impromptu meeting of this society in the bush. For this intrusion the laws of the society automatically condemned the girl to death, and she was straightway executed before her father's eyes.

Instances of this kind have not been at all unusual. In fact, justice of the sort summarily meted out to all and sundry at the discretion of the high moguls of these secret societies, has been the rule rather than the exception. So that life, from the standpoint of the underdog in the West African body politic, has consisted largely in threading his way carefully between one or another secret society, never being quite sure when, for any reason or none, he would be elected to play the leading rôle in a sacrificial ceremony that might, quite possibly, be climaxed by a solemn yet ardent exhibition of cannibalism.

OUT of the fear ridden beginnings of the secret society in West Africa, quite a number have developed into social clubs, while others have taken on a decidedly religious face, with a well established priesthood and, as might be expected, a "student body" that is principally and secretly engaged in learning how to practise the black art of making people they don't like have a cataleptic fit at five minutes past three on Thursday afternoons. Of course, this isn't the only useful thing they learn how to do, but most of their other tricks are just as disconcerting and often a lot more startling.

As may be deduced from the foregoing, no one knows very much about the inner workings of these West African secret societies; only that they exist and that the least consequent village has, above all else, its club house—its shrine of secrecy dedicated to whatever cult is predominant in that district.

—ROBERT SIMPSON

READERS, especially those of you who are detective story fans, will be glad to hear that three stories from our magazine are to be included in "The Best Detective Stories of 1930," edited by Carolyn Wells (herself a noted writer of mystery tales), and published by the John Day Company. These stories, as a letter from the publisher informs me, will be twenty in number, chosen from the leading periodicals and volumes of short stories brought out in 1930.

The *Adventure* authors to be represented are: Allan Vaughan Elston with his story "Drawing Room B"; L. G. Blochman with "Red Wine"; and Joseph Szebenyei with "The Master of the Conjuror's Guild."

FROM Tasmania comes an interesting letter giving a few sidelights on the cattle industry in Australia. Especially noteworthy is Mr. Norman's comparison

of the native stock rider and our Western cowpuncher:

Lindisfarne, Hobart,
Tasmania, Australia

The word "bush" is pretty loosely used to cover all Australian back country, but all the interior, ranging from a line about two to three hundred miles from the coast is altogether different from the timbered coastal land. Inland Australia is a country of plains and deserts, largely treeless or covered with low scrub. As you know, about one-third of Australia is unpeopled save for blacks. From the look of the country, I should say it will remain unsettled for the next thousand years.

Among the snapshots I am enclosing is one of Queensland cattle coming into Marree, on the Oodnadatta line, for trucking south to Adelaide. Marree has a population of two hundred people, half of them white, and half colored. The colored half consists of full-blooded black, yellows or halfcaste white-blacks, halfcaste black and Afghan, full-blooded Afghans, with stray nomadic Sikhs and Persians. The "white Australia" policy gives the impression that Australia is all white save for the native black and a few Chinese.

The Afghans came into the country with the camel. Now they own hundreds and thousands of camels and are on every long desert pack route. In 'Ghan Town in Marree you will see the Afghans as in their own country, wearing their native dress.

THE Australian black is allowed to kill settlers' stock for meat. The line is drawn when he kills meat he doesn't want or runs stock off wholesale. Three blacks were brought in for horse and cattle stealing while I was in Marree, and received sentences ranging from one to three months. I met the son of a man speared by blacks last year. Some while previously a well known station owner was bluffed into agreeing to the demands of an Afghan standing behind a gun, while another 'Ghan shot a woman.

The country I was in lies two hundred miles from the nearest place where any crop is grown or farming done. It is purely stock country. Nothing at all is grown and most of the land is unfenced. Black stockmen are largely used in the roundup. Many of the stations have more black and yellow riders than white. Just as the Western cowman felt he had a war with the sheepman, so does the Australian station man feel he has a war with the farmer. But the stock country is secure against farming apparently for all time. Nobody can stop the sun shining and the winds blowing, and the *booma* sandstorms are guaranteed to remove any crop from the ground, by simply plucking it out by the roots when it isn't mown down by sharp, driven sand. This cuts down even the selection of desert herbage Nature invoked to withstand the desert drought and wind. To give some idea of the dryness, this country has had *four* inches of rain in *seven* years.

AS TO the difference between the American cow puncher's dress and the Australian stock rider's: There is not a great deal. The American sombrero is worn, besides the flat brimmed hat. Chaps are never worn. The Australian riding boot is made of thin leather, with high heels, a closed or laceless front, and elastic let-in at the sides to enable the boot to be pulled on. At the belt are two pouches, one for a knife, the other for a watch. Hatbands and belts are sometimes plaited from snakeskin, etc., and the belts are worth around two pounds. No gun is worn except in bad Myall country, or on the pad with cattle.

I stayed awhile on a station, and found things haven't changed much in the years of my absence in Tasmania. The motor truck and car have come—when I was a kid in West Australia the Ford was just beginning to poke a trembling radiator along bush trails—and the airplane has come. But they pass without changing the face of the bush. Neither the car nor the plane made such a dent in the wilderness as the more ancient railroad.

IN THE Australian winter, when almost weekly mobs of cattle are reaching the railroad at Marree from the Queensland trail, that sun blistered town is very much like a Western cowtown. The riders get paid off as they come in and have nothing to do except hang around the bar and play whisky poker. You'll see the same big hatted types (although in this case some of them are black) sitting along the street, yarning, whittling, spitting, cussing. You'll see the same bowlegs promenading the sidewalk. The quiet is broken by a mob of packhorses going out, and riders taking the trail again.

Now and then you come across an American. I met one who had come in from a three months' trek with cattle. Western Americans find a home from home in this stock country. While any other stranger in the land, while even some Australians from non-stock country, are known as newchums, a Western American is never so labeled.

On the whole, Americans from the Western States find on the inland plains a life and geography close kin to that of parts of their own country. The white Australian station hand is more closely related to the American cowboy than any other frontiersman save the Canadian. But I don't think the resemblance between the two countries and the two types of frontiersmen is so noticeable elsewhere in Australia as in the northern part of South Australia. The semi-cockney accent of the coastal districts and cities is hardly heard here; the colloquial phraseology is almost exactly the same as the Western vernacular, though there is a difference in vowel sounds.

—N. W. NORMAN

ASK ADVENTURE

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Skiing

HINTS for the beginner.

Request:—"I've never skied before, but we have enough snow here now to ski on.

I would appreciate it a lot if you could give me a few pointers on how to keep from killing myself when I get on a pair of skis for the first time."

—GEO. A. ROSMIS, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Walt. Price:—My first advice would be to start skiing without the use of poles, as they are sometimes dangerous to the beginner. There is not much chance of hurting yourself if you start with small hills and gradually increase the size and grade as you gain confidence in yourself.

On the level, hold your skis exactly parallel and as close together as possible (not more than two inches apart) and take a long, easy, lunging step, keeping the knee of the advancing leg well over the foot, and leaning the body well forward.

To start from the top of a hill is a simple matter; you walk to the edge and slide over in any direction you choose. Running downhill, hold the skis close together so that they leave a single track; one ski about a foot in advance of the other; the advanced leg almost straight at the knee, the other more bent—nearly all the weight on the back foot. The inside of the front knee should be pressed against the kneecap of the other; body erect and arms hanging easily by the sides.

I would suggest you get a good book on how to ski, and would recommend one entitled "How To

Ski" by Vivian Caulfeild, which is very helpful to a beginner.

South Seas

FIRE-WALKERS and sorcerers. One investigator ventures the opinion that the glowing stones aren't really so very hot.

Request:—"I am enclosing a clipping which tells of the fire walking ceremonies of the Tahuas or native sorcerers of the South Sea Islands. It describes how the Tahuas of Tahiti in the old days used to walk across an oven of red hot stones in their bare feet. Frederick O'Brien also told of them in one of his books. The clipping contains accounts of similar ceremonies in Rarotonga.

In one case white men followed the Tahua over the hot stones without injury to their bare feet. A man who disobeyed the Tahua by looking backward was badly burned. A newspaper thrown on the stones soon crumbled to ashes and a thermometer held over them at a height of six feet registered a temperature of 282 degrees Fahrenheit. There seems to be no trickery or deception of any kind connected with it. Can you explain how it is done?"

—C. O. FLINT, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Reply, by Mr. James Stanley Meagher:—The fire walking stunt of the native South Sea sorcerers was a fact all right and was often pulled off. However, I can not vouch for all the statements in the article you sent.

In explanation I will offer you the theory of a fellow of scientific bent who one time witnessed a ceremony of this nature in Fiji. He made a test of the stones used in that particular case and stated that they were actually poor conductors of heat, although of a red hot color. By walking quickly over them a person might escape being burned at all, he said. This appeared to be a plausible theory at the time, and probably accounts for a feat which otherwise would require a whole lot of explanation.

Hoover Dam

HOW to get to Las Vegas, Nevada, and the sort of country you will find around Boulder Cañon.

Request:—"I would like some information on the Boulder Dam.

1. What part of Colorado it is in?
2. Whom shall I see or write to about employment?
3. What is the best and cheapest way to get there?
4. What are the principal towns near that location?"—MAURICE HENDRICKSON, New York City

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—The Boulder Dam project is not in Colorado at all, but is located in the valley of the Colorado River below the Grand Cañon in what is known as Boulder Cañon. It is about 90 miles north of Needles, Cal., where the A.T. & Santa Fé R. R. crosses the river. It is also on the State boundary between Arizona on the east and Nevada on the west.

You might write to the Reclamation Service, Dept. of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. or to the Chamber of Commerce, Las Vegas, Nevada.

The best and least expensive route is by railroad, New York to Chicago, then Santa Fé to Las Vegas. You could of course go by auto over the road. This, if more than one person was making the trip, would be the cheapest, unless you had some very bad luck in the way of repairs. I have made the trip from central Montana to Massachusetts for a total expense of $150, covering two adults and one child. My son recently made the trip from San Antonio, Texas, to Massachusetts for about $50. You can judge for yourself about way to go.

Las Vegas, Nevada (not Las Vegas, New Mexico) is about 20 miles west of the project. Kingman, Arizona, is about 70 miles southeast. These are the only cities or towns of any size. The former has a population of about 2,500; the latter about 1,200. Of course, there are several smaller towns along the railroads.

The project will when completed irrigate several million acres of land, mostly I believe in California.

Gems and Stones

THE Arizona garnet—a red pebble that is brought from the earth by the lowly ant, gathered by the Indian and sold to the tourist—is often as lovely as the prized ruby of India.

Request:—"1. In knocking around Arizona I bought about half a dozen small, bright red pebbles from an Indian. I like their color, but I don't think they are rubies as some one said. How can I tell what they are and what they are worth? There are also two blue stones which were called turquoise.

2. I'm becoming interested in precious stones and would like to know more about them. Where can I get books on the subject?

3. Are any valuable stones found in the United States? I had an idea that most stones were from India.

4. Where can I get some machinery for polishing beach pebbles? I have a great many of them, some of which I have had polished and which look fine."

—H. BLAKE, Peekskill, New York

Reply, by Mr. T. J. Esterlin:—1. Although I'd have to see these stones before passing judgment, what you doubtless have is the beautiful Arizona garnet. These small pebbles, looking like drops of blood, are brought up from the earth by the lowly ant, to be gathered by the Indians and traded for supplies, money or perhaps tobacco. So they find

their way to the lapidary, who completes the work started by the ant by bringing out the hidden beauty of the stone. While never large, they are the most beautiful of all the garnets, often possessing the beauty of color of the prized ruby of India. Turquoise is found in Arizona, being a favorite gem of the Indians, so you are probably right on this score. Send along any stones about which you are in doubt and you will be welcome to any information I can give you.

2. No general discussion of gems can be given in a letter, but State bureaus of mines usually publish pamphlets covering gems of their States. In libraries, look for "Precious Stones"—by Max Bauer, "Precious and Semi-Precious Stones"—by Kraus & Holden, as well as books by Dr. George F. Kuntz, who treats many phases of gem study, from technical work to folk-lore. Any definite points on which you are not clear, I'll be glad to discuss with you, but send the rock you're interested in, so I won't have to describe all of the rocks which it could be, from your description.

3. While many gem stones are found in India, the United States has its share. Turquoise from Nevada, amethyst from Arizona, topaz from Idaho. North Carolina has amethyst, Maine tourmaline and rose quartz, Montana, the beautiful cornflower blue sapphire, as well as garnet, Michigan, agate and Thomsonite, Connecticut, beryl, and many other stones found in these and other States, too numerous to mention. Campers, hikers, in fact, any one of us who tramps the hills and valleys, can not resist picking up the vari-colored pebbles found in streams or along the shores of lakes and oceans. Most of these have no particular value, although interesting colors and designs are often brought out when they are polished.

4. Every lapidary builds his own equipment to suit his particular needs. Most lapidary shops differ in some respects, for this reason, and I know of no concern who can build such equipment. While the underlying principle is constant, such equipment is the result of the lapidary's own growth and experience.

"Hard Boiled Smith"

WAS he—is he—man or legend, this mysterious character of the A.E.F?

Request:—"1. You probably have heard the stories of 'Hard Boiled Smith' of the A. E. F. Some say he was a Marine sergeant; an Army captain, etc. Others say he was sent to Leavenworth after the war for a five-year stretch. Could you straighten this out for me and give me all the dope on this Hard Boiled Smith?"

—P. REMINGTON, JR., Bronx, New York

Reply, by Capt. T. W. Hopkins:—1. Anent "Hard Boiled Smith". I do not believe any one can give you authentic information. I have heard it stated very positively that "Hard Boiled Smith" is a myth, and no doubt many of the stories about him have collected on his name and were actually numerous instances about numerous M. P's. In other words, sort of a "King Arthur" legend. On the other hand, I have heard it as positively stated that he was and is a very real man. Both of these expressions I have received from Marines who served in France, men who were old-timers before the war and not prone to childish fancies.

I served with a gunnery sergeant in the Corps who was an Army M. P. in Paris during 1917-18. He was in charge of a certain well known bastile or other. He stated to me one time that "Hard Boiled" was a real man, that he was a former college boy and football player, and that he was an Army officer, and never was or had been a Marine.

I am certain Smith never was a Marine. Calm discussion of the fact leaves the impression that he was a husky, rather featherheaded fellow who was commissioned among thousands of others, who let his job run away with him.

I do not think that he ever went to Leavenworth. I heard that rumor too. I can only say my opinion is as above stated, that he was a young and tough kid who let his job run away with him, and to whose name many fictitious tales have been attached, and many that properly belong to others. I personally, except for the gunnery sergeant mentioned, never in seven years' service, mostly after the war, met any one who ever said they saw him.

Government Trapper

LOCAL men acquainted with the country are usually chosen for the job of trapping predatory animals; and part of their expense is borne by the stockmen, in a program of cooperation with the Department of Agriculture.

Request:—"I would like to become a Government trapper or game warden.

To whom should I apply or to what department at Washington?"

—SCOTT H. DONHOM, Little Rock, Arkansas

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—Government predatory animal trapper and Government game warden are two separate positions. Both are under the supervision of—and you should write to—The Biological Survey, Dept. of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. I might state for your information, however, that the positions in either branch of service are very limited in number, and therefore quite difficult to obtain. There are only some forty-five Federal game wardens in the United States and Alaska, I understand. Trappers are usually selected from local men who are thoroughly acquainted with the country in which the trapping is to be done. This is especially true since the policy has been established of cooperation with local stockmen, or associations, who bear part of the expense.

The *Cyclops*

ANOTHER unfounded rumor of the long-lost collier.

Request:—"*Re* U. S. Collier *Cyclops:* I have understood that this ship was lost during the war—with no trace of either ship or crew—that it simply disappeared. A friend of mine fishes near Georgetown, S. C., and he tells me that there is a wreck of a steel hulled vessel, about 20 miles east of Georgetown, on inside of the rock ledge; it is broken in two parts. On good clear days you can see outlines quite clearly. He says that the natives (I mean the fishermen) say that this is the wreck of the *Cyclops.*

They say it was wrecked during the war, no one was saved, but that since that time several efforts were made to salvage it and tow it into Georgetown; that at first the ship was in one piece, but during some salvage operation it broke in two pieces, and these pieces are about ½ mile apart. My friend talked to several people in Georgetown, and they all told the same story. He told them that he had always read of the *Cyclops* as being lost without a trace. They told him that it was no mystery to them and insisted it was the *Cyclops.*

The Government has the wreck marked with a whistling buoy.

If this isn't the *Cyclops,* please advise what ship this is."

—C. R. EDWARDS, Chester, South Carolina

Reply, by Lieut. Harry E. Rieseberg:—In answer to your letter in which you advise that you have been informed that a wreck which is off the coast of Georgetown is that of the long lost *Cyclops,* I wish to advise that the Government would have investigated at the time of placing a buoy thereon and had it been the *Cyclops* a record to the press and public would have been made. The wreck which you refer to, which the Lighthouse service has placed a buoy on, may be fully described by applying direct to the Director, Lighthouse Service, Commerce Department, Washington, D. C., as they have a record of all wrecks, etc., on which a buoy might be placed and could assist you in explaining the matter.

Quebec

AN INTERESTING question about the black bears: Do they really reach up into the jackpine trees to see how much they've grown over the winter? Or, after hibernation, do they just indulge in a good healthy stretch?

Request:—"Perhaps you can settle two points for me concerning the black bears of Northern Quebec. I was through by Lake Kawagama in '23 and remember arguments over these questions, but I never met any one who knew. That is, for sure.

What kind of bears are up there? And do they ever make the peculiar marks high up on spruce, etc, with their teeth, back to the bark, and craning their heads up and around? I've seen the marks and have had woodsmen tell me that they did that to measure themselves after hibernation. Others disputed it, and I recently read that the grizzlies in the Rockies made marks like that with their claws. But I've seen hair on the bark, so I wonder. I saw lots of prints, fresh ones, but never saw the bear itself doing this."

—P. C. HATMAKER, Tucson, Arizona

Reply, by Mr. S. E. Sangster:—The only bear in Northern Quebec is the commonly known Black Bear—probably the most timid and harmless animal we have in the North. Yes, they do, after coming out in the spring, after hibernation, have a habit of reaching up on the jackpine and spruce trees and clawing as high as they can reach, standing upright. This is commonly said to be done by them to show their height and whether grown from the previous year. I do not think they make the marks in the bark with their teeth, but with their front paws. I have seen many, many such marked trees all over the North, including the Kawagama Lake section and the Harricanaw.

South America

DRUGS and poisons as yet unsuspected may be concealed in the roots, barks, berries, beans and leaves of the continent that has produced cocaine and quinine. A botanist-chemist, in search of medicinal and aromatic herbs, could find no richer field for investigation.

Request:—"I would be pleased to hear from you about the opportunity offered in South America for an exploring botanist and chemist in search of new drug plants for medical use, also for aromatic barks, berries, beans, etc.

1. Is cocaine gathered wild or cultivated?
2. Also quinine?
3. Do you know of any allied plants?
4. Please outline trip for me. State expense."

—ROY TRAHERN, Swanton, Ohio

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—There is a vast field in South America for the explorations of a botanist and chemist in search of new drug plants for medicinal use. Both quinine and cocaine were unknown to the world before the Spanish found them being used by the Indians when they discovered South America. There are also several other similar drugs which are being used by the Indians today which have never had the serious attention of druggists they deserve. It seems to me that a close study of what the eighty or more various sorts of Indians in South America use as medicines

and poisons, poultices, etc., would bring to light some interesting facts.

There is little doubt in my mind that, having lived for centuries with local plants, they know their qualities just as our own Indians had learned the values of various roots, barks, berries, etc., (including tobacco) before they were visited by Europeans. Of course there is a wide field for a man, out on his own in the jungles, to study the plants and perhaps find some that are unknown for medical use even to the Indians.

1. Cocaine is an indigenous shrub but it is widely cultivated. It is called coca.

2. Quinine is mostly gathered wild and is known to commerce as red bark. It may be cultivated but I have never seen any so grown.

3. Allied plants to coca are all the shrubs of the ilex or holly family in South America. These include herba mate or tree tea, Huayasi or another sort of tea, and several similar plants.

4. Eastern Peru, Eastern Bolivia, Eastern Ecuador, and the entire Amazon basin. The expense would depend. One outfit that went in spent a considerable sum and did little actual discovery work in the drug line. A lone man might do it for as little as $2,500 for a year.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, Copeland Manor, Libertyville, Illinois.

Motor Boating GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, New Jersey.

Motor Camping MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., care American Tourist Camp Assn., 152 West 65th St., New York City.

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Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 939 Timberman Road, Grandview, Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., 821 Elmwood Ave., Evanston, Illinois.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., 821 Elmwood Ave., Evanston, Illinois.

Camping and Woodcraft HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere in North America. Questions on mines, mining, mining law, methods and practise; where and how to prospect; outfitting; development of prospect after discovery; general geology and mineralogy necessary for prospector or miner in any portion of territory named. Any question on any mineral, metallic or nonmetallic.* —VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Precious and Semi-precious Stones *Cutting and polishing of gem materials; principal sources of supply; technical information regarding physical characteristics, crystalography, color and chemical compositions.*—F. J. ESTERLIN, 210 Post St., San Francisco, Cal.

Forestry in the United States *Big-Game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and products; economic possibilities; distribution; exploration, etc. No questions on employment.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care of Insular Forester, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk, General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ripon, Wisconsin.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS V. GREENE, U. S. N. R., 333 Fifty-fourth St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

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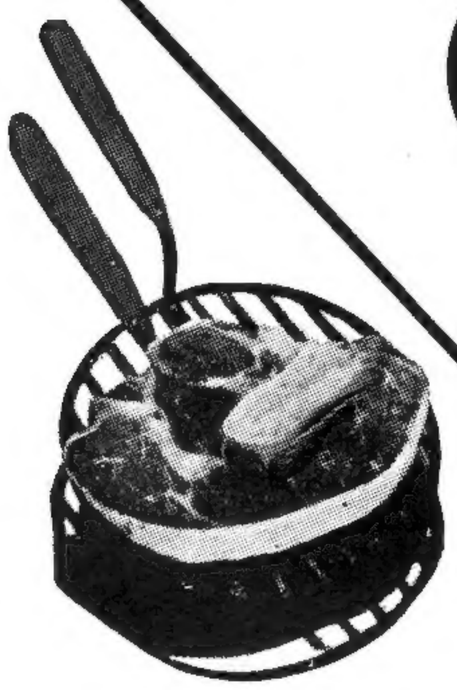

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